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POOR COPY: FAN PRACTICES AND PRODUCERLY ART MAKING

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PLYMOUTH

POOR COPY: FAN PRACTICES AND
PRODUCERLY ART MAKING

by

BETH EMILY RICHARDS

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Humanities and Performing Arts

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In memory of my Grandad, Ken Maxwell. *“History is just like every other yarn, sometimes the storyteller changes it to suit himself”.*

For Obi, constant friend and patient witness to my work.

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Public presentations of creative research outputs:

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2019 | Fanspeak, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester |
| 2018 | PooR Life by dog people, Transition Two, London (duo with Owen G Parry) |
| 2018 | Mount Florida Screenings & Plymouth Arts Centre Exchange, Plymouth Arts Centre, as part of Plymouth Art Weekender |

- 2018 Poor Copy, Jerwood Visual Arts, London (solo)
- 2018 Poor Copy, Exeter Phoenix (solo)
- 2018 Poor Copy, The Northern Charter, Newcastle (solo)
- 2018 Mount Florida Screenings & Plymouth Arts Centre Exchange, CCA Glasgow,
as part of Glasgow International
- 2017 EMERGENCY, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth
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- 2017 Fan Studies Network Conference, University of Huddersfield
- 2017 Troubling Time: An Exploration of Temporality in the Arts, University of
Manchester
- 2017 Nordic Summer University Winter Symposium: Legacy, Ricklundgården,
Sweden
- 2017 Conditions for Creative Communities, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge and Tate
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- 2016 Archiving Subcultures, Arnolfini, Bristol
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Poor Copy: fan practices and producerly art making

Abstract

This thesis includes a body of artworks including performance, video, photography and audio installation, a zine, and textile artwork, documentation of which is presented via a YouTube channel, also titled *Poor Copy*.

This research explores methodological similarities between fan and art practices, and analyses how fans, artists, and their methods of making engage with extant narratives. Two histories act as a narrative throughline for this investigation: a 1999 Michael Jackson concert in Barnstaple, North Devon, where the performer may or may not have been a tribute artist; and a day in 2002 when Michael Jackson visited Exeter City Football Club, Devon. I use these intersecting histories as a narrative way in to making a new body of art work as a practitioner-researcher, to ask how might art-making processes and products foster, embrace and represent activities that empower participants (artists, fans, and audiences) to create, change or build on dominant histories and mythologies?

I analyse the notion of ‘tribute’ via my experiences at Europe’s largest Elvis tribute artist competition, and a subsequent practice-research experiment at the Experimentica live art festival at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff. Using theory from both fan and performance studies, I position tribute as a transformative practice: in which an existing ‘text’ is re-enacted with new expression; and in which both performers and audience go through a significant (though temporary) change. Elvis tribute artists act simultaneously as ‘the’ Elvis and as Elvis fan, and

audiences act as co-conspirators in this performance ‘resurrection’ of ‘The King’. I identify how Michael Jackson tribute artists highlight tribute’s ability to unpack identity performances as iterative, which is underscored by Jackson’s changing and complex performances of identity. Representations of Jackson’s performances and histories via performances and artworks contribute to his star text; intertextuality means that when additional Jackson-related narratives come to light, such as the allegations of child sexual abuse, these artworks are often received differently, and new exhibition platforms should consider how to sensitively handle critical discussion. Not all representations of Jackson need be a ‘tribute’.

I create two practice-research artworks, *Yes, It Really Did Happen* and *No Such Event Took Place*, to demonstrate that fannish engagements with archival fragments can happen within institutional archives, and that these participations are characterised by treating the material as producerly: following John Fiske, these are texts which are open, containing gaps, irresolutions and contradictions. Producerly texts invite creative re-inventions. I make a practice-research video work *raremjvideos1*, and zine and banner artworks to draw comparisons between fan and contemporary art practices: both use appropriation and repetition to platform subjectivity; the notion of an established canon (and at times narrative clarity) are set aside, to embrace fannish myth-making. My practice-research acts as fan art *of* fan art, and demonstrates that when re-presenting archival texts, myth and memory blur the lines between ‘then’ and ‘again’. I develop and stage a versioned practice-research performance work *Like A Pantomime* which positions verbatim theatre techniques as a way to engage with and platform a multiplicity of community voices, and their perspectives of cultural memory.

Through this practice-research, I position Jackson’s narratives and performances as producerly texts which beget producerly practices. By producerly practices, I mean appropriative practices

which transform the originary for the producers' own purposes and pleasures. Producerly practices are similarly open and malleable in their reading and reception as a producerly text is, and often will invite future interpretations. Producerly practices are also inherently iterative, offering opportunities for the sharing, discussion, and repetition of artworks with and by communities, allowing for changes in (and critical reflection of) narrative-construction. When working with archival fragments, cultural memories, and community historiographies, understandings and perspectives of the past will vary. I propose several discursive strategies of art-making to platform a variety of voices in artworks which engage with the past: re-versioning, verbatim, and agonism. These dialogic methods recognise that ethics are at the fore of research projects which speak of contentious histories, but acknowledges that an ethical approach does not necessarily mean a neutral one. An agonist methodology in particular respects and gives voice not only to community members, but also to the subjectivity of the practice-researcher: by platforming often-conflicting retellings, the artwork deconstructs the idea of an objective historical narrative, and instead celebrates fannish myth-making.

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It is difficult to discuss histories which involve Michael Jackson without mentioning allegations of child sexual abuse. While there is no graphic description of abuse, the allegations (and how fan communities engage or disengage with victims' statements) are discussed throughout the thesis. Please engage with this work in a way that is compassionate to yourself and to others.

PROLOGUE

MICHAEL JACKSON'S POSTCARD FROM DEVON

Back in 2015, I was working at my admin day job when I received an email from my partner, with a link to a BBC news article. Opening it, the article described how ‘finally’, after 15 years, the mystery of the Michael Jackson in Barnstaple concert had been solved: that tribute artist Anthony King had come forward and revealed that he had performed in the June 1999 concert in the North Devon town, and that it was not Michael Jackson himself, as many believed. The article explained that despite Michael Jackson’s publicity team releasing a statement that the concert could not have been performed by Jackson, as he was in Los Angeles at that time, many audience members refused to believe this, stating that the performance was ‘too good’ to be anyone else but the King of Pop.¹

Having recently been making work around notions of tribute after visiting Europe’s biggest Elvis lookalike contest, this article piqued my interest. I loved the idea that readers had been waiting to hear the resolution of this ‘mystery’ for fifteen years. The statement that audience members were adamant that they had ‘witnessed’ Jackson, despite evidence to the contrary, was fascinating. I googled around to find out more. A *North Devon Journal* article released on the same day gave further information - in particular, that the concert had been organised by a Barnstaple businessman Matt Fiddes, who runs a chain of martial arts schools. The *North Devon Journal* article², while still only relating bare facts, did not paint a complimentary picture of Fiddes; the inference was that he was capitalising on Jackson’s fame and fortune for

¹ As this digital article was only available for around twenty-four hours, I am unable to cite it. The deletion of the article is in itself significant to this story.

² This article was also only available online and taken down less than a day after publishing.

his own ends. It implied that Fiddes advertised the 1999 concert with the ‘real’ Jackson as headline act for Fiddes’ personal financial gain.

A blog post and YouTube video was also released³, with further statements from King, describing his working relationship with Fiddes and with further details of the hoax concert. Realising that there was a possible project in this, but thinking that I had already wasted enough of my day job time on this bizarre story, I resolved to look into this further the next day when I was working on my art practice. The next day, both news stories were gone. I refreshed the links, and searched both the BBC Devon and *North Devon Journal* sites: there was nothing related to this story. King’s blog and the YouTube video were also removed. This was maddening; I felt like this was the start of a possible art project and now that the information was gone I was even more sure that I wanted to investigate this. I emailed King to ask whether he was the performer, but received no response.

I emailed Matt Fiddes’ contact on his website for his martial arts schools to enquire further. This was the puzzling reply:

Hi Beth

You will notice the story has been taken down early last week within a few hours. The story was false and legal action has commenced against the news papers [*sic*] who ran with the story

No such event took place

³ These online sources were also removed. All sources in this section with no citation have been deleted, presumably due to threats of litigation.

Regards

MFHQ

(Fiddes and Richards, 2015)

Now I was even more intrigued. Why would Fiddes claim that this event hadn't taken place? There were older articles from 1999 still online which documented the concert via audience member interviews (BBC, 1999; The Herald Scotland, 1999). There was no way this event was a fabrication. Not to be put off, I called the *North Devon Journal* and asked if there was any way I could view an archived article of the removed story. The editor explained that this wasn't possible, and asked why I was interested. I explained my practice-research interests and that I had already contacted King and Fiddes. The editor's tone of voice changed very suddenly, and urged me not to contact Fiddes again, as he was a manipulative and very litigious man.

I returned to Google to build up a picture of accounts of the 1999 concert. During this internet search, many weblinks appeared connecting Fiddes to Jackson and the Jackson family. There were a series of sleazy tabloid articles with Fiddes as the subject or as the key source, with no evidence to back up their lurid claims:

- 'Michael Jackson's former bodyguard vows to take legal action to prove he is Blanket's real father' (Kirby, 2012, online)
- 'Michael Jackson's order to shoot Randy' (Tinney, 2012a, online)
- 'Michael Jackson had a fling with Whitney ... and wanted to get married – Says Matt Fiddes, Jacko's minder' (Tinney, 2012b, online)

These ‘cash for celeb stories’ articles allegedly sold by Fiddes are very thoroughly catalogued on the Jackson fansite ‘Et Tu, Brutus?’, which I have included as an appendix (youtoobrutus, 2012, online).

‘Read through’ of the youtoobrutus authored blogpost:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg3DmUhYGbY&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjFa1hCI7eNWol7gCB7Wmip&index=11>

It must be noted that this fan site’s agenda (like many other Jackson fan sites) is to discredit any of Jackson’s detractors, so although I believe that the stories had no truth to them, this website’s own construction of histories also have very specific, often problematic, objectives.

One story which was picked up by the broadsheets was the legal battle between Fiddes and the production company Studio Lambert and documentary filmmaker Jane Preston, over the Channel Four project *The Jacksons Are Coming To Devon* (Preston, 2008). This hour-long TV programme followed Katherine Jackson (Michael’s mother), Tito Jackson (Michael’s brother) and his three sons (members of 1990s pop group 3T and Michael’s nephews) searching for a new home in Appledore, a small fishing village near Barnstaple. The ‘friend’ and ‘fixer’ for the Jacksons, who appeared prominently on the show? Matt Fiddes. Unsurprisingly, the programme documented that the Jacksons didn’t find their dream home in Devon and that they returned to Los Angeles. Michael Jackson never appeared in the documentary, or in Appledore. Instead, Fiddes’ friend, the Michael Jackson tribute artist Navi performed was documented, as were the relationships between Tito Jackson and Fiddes becoming tense and difficult. Paparazzi followed the Jacksons everywhere in the programme, and it becomes evident that Fiddes is the one tipping them off, as well as providing tens of his martial arts students to act

as ‘minders’ for the family, which doesn’t help them keep a low profile. Tito eventually decides to stop contact with Fiddes; the Jacksons’ Devon visit then becomes a quieter affair, with fish and chip dinners, walks on the beach, and games of Pictionary.

The director stated that ‘the overriding thing for me whilst making this film was the idea of trust and betrayal. Everyone that comes into [the Jacksons] lives seems to have their own aims and objectives’ (Preston in Carter, 2008, online). The documentary showed Fiddes gaining additional fame and money, leveraging the Jacksons to do so. Fiddes then launched a libel case against Preston and the production company, asserting that they had faked scenes to cast him as the villain. Fiddes dropped the case after 19 months, leaving each party with a legal bill of £1.7million (Bell, 2010, online).

The final ‘Jackson in Devon’ news story, which again Fiddes is linked to, is Michael Jackson’s visit to Exeter City Football Club (ECFC) in June 2002. For me, as someone living in the South West, this was a story I had always heard rumours of, but one I didn’t know whether to give credence to. As I began my sleuthing regarding the Barnstaple event, I also started to look into the ECFC story. This was well documented nationally; however, the responses of friends living in or near Exeter to my enquiries varied wildly, with some stating that they had seen Jackson themselves, others stating that it was apocryphal, an urban legend. Interestingly, even after approaching this research more seriously as part of this doctoral project, and conducting oral history interviews, one interviewee connected with the football club claims still to be unsure that the visit was from Jackson himself, instead suggesting that it could have been a tribute act as a stand in.⁴

⁴ My methods and sources for this will be discussed in detail throughout the substantive thesis.

An illusionist and television personality most famous for his powers of psychic spoon-bending in the 1970s, Uri Geller began to get involved with the football club because his son, Daniel, was a fan. Daniel had dreamt about the first witches to be hanged in England and said that he ‘felt a powerful spiritual draw to them’ (Geller, online, 2002). On the way to an Exeter City match, Daniel and Uri spotted a plaque marking the site where the witches had been hanged. From these events, Uri surmised that Daniel had lived in Exeter in a past life, which explained his ‘drive and passion for the club’ (Geller, online, 2002). Following this, Uri and Daniel became joint chairmen at ECFC. Uri then used what he described as his psychic powers to inspire victory in the team (although they were on a losing streak during this time) - burying ‘charged’ crystals beneath the football net, urging fans to massage orange spots printed in the local paper while chanting, etc. Uri declared to the local newspaper, the *Express and Echo*, that he would bring his ‘good friend’ Michael Jackson to St James Park (the club grounds), to raise awareness and funds for the club. Astonishingly, Jackson agreed, providing that he could also raise funds for other charities. Before visiting Exeter, Jackson and Geller visited the Houses of Parliament, at the invitation of labour peer Greville Janner (with whom Geller was friends via the Magic Circle), even dropping by on a birthday party for MP Paul Boateng. Jackson, Geller, and Janner then got on a train to Exeter with 200 Jackson fans, shepherded by ‘head of security’ for the event, Matt Fiddes. The event at Exeter City Football Club included a line up of music and other performances, and Jackson gave a speech, around eleven minutes long, which focused on world peace and ending AIDS and malaria. Throughout this speech, you can see (via local news documentation) Fiddes standing next to Jackson, sheltering him from the sun with a black umbrella. Later, Jackson met several children from the local children’s hospice. After Jackson’s visit, the club made him ‘honorary director’. Unfortunately, the celebrity visits did nothing to improve the fortunes of the football club, and its directors were shortly after jailed for defrauding the club.

These Jackson in Devon histories act as a narrative jumping off point for my doctoral thesis which follows.

INTRODUCTION

The body and narratives of Michael Jackson (1958-2009) are mythic, iconic and recognised globally. He has achieved fan scholar Matt Hills' (2002, p. 143) definition of 'cult status': he is received as a figure of genius and as '*auteur*', but also embodies a sense of excess and 'unknowability'. As Hills (p. 141) uses the figure of Elvis Presley to explain, death can wrest a celebrity's image creation from the cultural industries into the hands of audiences. The unsettling affect of Jackson's performances of hybridity (discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis) underlines this 'unknowability', creating a desire amongst his fans, and amongst many with an interest in pop culture, to continue to speculate on and interrogate his past. His performing body is an extreme 'cultural attractor': that is, an icon which invites participation by fans, part of a canon open enough to stimulate debate and transformative works, while also recognisable enough to be part of a consistent mythology (Zubernis and Larsen, 2012, p. 3).

The very 'globalness' of Michael Jackson makes it surprising when you find related narratives which took place close to you, outside of large metropolises. However, the 2015 *North Devon Journal* article about his supposed performance in Barnstaple in 1999, discussed in the prologue to this thesis, intrigued me for a number of other reasons as well: it related to the work I was making as an artist, as well as the Masters by Research (MRes) project I had recently completed in expanded re-enactment practices; it spoke about the gig as 'hoax' - many believed that they were seeing the 'real deal'; it connoted ideas around the power of performance and of belief - although Jackson's representatives denied that he was the performer back in 1999, many of the audience refused to believe this, stating that the performance was too amazing to be anybody BUT Jackson; that this was making the news (albeit local) sixteen years after the fact. After noticing that the *North Devon Journal* article had been removed from the website

and beginning to explore Jackson's 2002 visit to Exeter City Football Club, it became clear that the deeper I dug, the more these stories became tangled, confused, and hard to get to the bottom of. As many of these narratives involved legal action, online sources were frequently erased, often leaving instead a version of events filtered through fan commentary on fan forums and websites. Each aspect of each story is unusual, perhaps closed down or partially erased, unsettled and unclear.

In this PhD, I use these 'Jackson in Devon' stories to investigate methodological similarities between fan and art practices, and to explore how fans, artists, and their methods of making engage with extant narratives. These intersecting narratives act as a way into making a new body of art work as a practitioner-researcher, that explores how fans and the media documented them, and how these documents were then circulated, built upon, archived, and disseminated again. To do so, I draw upon the ways fan communities memorialise historical narratives, using material, digital, and oral historical fragments. I work across performance, visual art, and fan practices to explore fan methodologies of making: examining online fan labour, fan performance communities such as tribute artists and their audiences, and fan communities and their fan art. Bringing a practice-research methodology to the disciplines of fan studies and popular culture studies, I devise and deliver a series of artworks that investigate how reiterative strategies can present 'hidden' stories, explore which voices are missing from dominant extant narratives, and work within or without a 'canon',⁵ linking the creative practices of fans to that of twentieth and twenty-first century appropriative art practices.⁶

⁵ I use 'canon' to mean both the generally 'accepted' texts within a body of literature, and more specifically within fandom sources which are agreed as 'authoritative' within a fandom (Fanlore, 2019a, online).

⁶ Appropriation in art and art history terminology refers to the practice of artists using pre-existing images, objects, and texts in their artwork (Tate, 2020, online).

Key to this investigation is the analysis of how different fan communities, fan producers, and artists construct, access, share and interpret archives. I aim to show, through practice-research, how archival remnants can be used, misused, and reconfigured. In doing so, I contrast performance studies and fannish approaches to archives;⁷ consider how artists can use fan methods of making when working with archival material; investigate different types of texts and audiences through making; and consider how to perform cultural memory and make evident myth-making through art-making.

My methods of making begin with an extant narrative, whether historical or fictive, and re-work it, to turn it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression. Creative ‘again-ness’ is used by various communities which act as cultural producers: reenactors, fandoms, and artists. The texts that are re-worked are ‘producerly’: a key term in fan studies, taken from John Fiske’s (1989, 1992, 2011) work on the cultural economy of fandom. Producerly texts follow from Roland Barthes’ conception of ‘writerly’ texts, which (as opposed to ‘readerly’ texts) place the reader in an active position in the construction of meaning, their agency contributing to the creation of multiple narratives. According to Barthes, ‘the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text’ (Barthes, 1974, p. 4). Fiske states that fan texts - that is, the existing cultural properties and narratives to which fans make artwork and stories in response - are producerly in that they invite fan labour by being open, containing gaps, irresolutions and contradictions. Producerly texts go a step further than writerly, to invite a creative reinvention, a reworking, a redoing.

⁷ Later in this introduction I discuss how I am making use of differing fields’ definitions of ‘archive’.

In the early stages of this doctoral research project, I was also working with two other possible histories as narrative starting points to examine how communities of interest engage creatively with archives. The first was the cultural commemorations of the four hundredth anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower, specifically looking at how underserved communities and artists could approach this from a decolonial perspective.⁸ The second was working collaboratively with a group of rurally-based artists, writers, and occultists to explore the rituals and divinatory art practices of surrealist artist, writer, and occult practitioner Ithell Colquhoun (1906-1988). I chose to focus on the Jackson in Devon histories within this thesis as it offered several lines of enquiry that the other possibilities did not.

Michael Jackson is internationally regarded as one of the most culturally significant people of the twentieth century. He represents the height of celebrity, which some cultural studies and religious studies scholars position as a new hegemonic influence on society, who fans position as an idol or almost god-like figure (Ward, 2012; Laderman, 2010). Celebrity culture has become even more ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, with social media giving us a window into stars' lives whenever we wish to engage with it (and sometimes when we do not). Their histories and stories have become the narratives which we discuss with family, friends, co-workers. The Jackson in Devon histories were both before the social media era, and pre-smartphones, and this affects how the stories are told, archived, and how I and fans engage with them; I discuss this in Chapters Three and Four. The Jackson visit to Exeter City Football Club offers a history which has been experienced, documented, and memorialised by two very different fan communities: a global music fan community for Jackson, and a much smaller and more local sports fan community of Exeter City Football Club fan supporters. This allows me

⁸ At the time of submitting this PhD thesis, I am exploring this via a socially engaged curatorial project, *Reverberations*.

to research how two different fan communities engage with the same event. As well as these communities of interest, the communities of geography of Exeter and Barnstaple have also shared remembrances of these events, and inform my work. Both the Barnstaple ‘Jackson’ concert and the Exeter event have elements of tribute performance which I examine as a fannish practice. The Jackson in Devon histories also act a nexus for what is an interdisciplinary enquiry: its narratives are of interest and relevance to the fields of performance, visual art, fan, popular culture, and cultural memory studies across which I am working and from which key theories and methodological modes I am working with (see more below in the methodologies section of this introduction).

Jackson is a contentious celebrity: he is held aloft as musical idol by millions of fans, while condemned by many others based on allegations of child sex abuse. As my research progressed, it became evident that this would not be a footnote within the work, but central to its negotiation and my findings. The allegations came up again and again in different ways within the archives and in the documentary fragments that I worked with, and were often raised by the different fan communities themselves. In April 2019, the documentary *Leaving Neverland* was released. Directed by Dan Reed, it investigated Jackson child sex abuse allegations by two of his accusers. While this was released after the making of the practice-research, the allegations both before and after the film has impacted on the artworks’ readings. I explore how fans and non-fans engage with the cultural products and histories of an artist who has been alleged to have been an abuser.

Fan studies demonstrates how communities of interest react and interact with broader societal phenomena, including significant social and political movements and ideas: researching how fans archive, memorialise, and make creative practice around a fan object which has had

serious allegations levelled against it, has notable contemporary relevance. Fans and non-fans process histories and cultural moments which act as touchstones for wider societal issues. Certainly, there is tension between the passion and creativity of fandom and fans' narrative practices, with the challenges of narratives of trauma within that fandom. As fan scholar Cornell Sandvoss observes:

the question emerges whether enthusiasm and fandom might also serve to erode the challenges of the unknown, the fantastic and the 'hard-to-make-sense-of' in our cultural encounters (Sandvoss, 2013, online).

This is further complicated by the fact that, in this project, as a researcher, I am a visitor to both the fan communities and the non-fan audiences I am working with. I am neither Jackson fan, Exeter City fan, nor was I present for neither the Barnstaple or Exeter events. I attempt to remain respectful of the fans' positions while still respecting my own position as feminist artist; the ethics of this engagement is discussed further in the methodologies section below (and throughout the thesis, with a focus in Chapter Five).

While I engage with the documentary fragments and archives of these events, I also engage with their contexts, their nuances, their gaps and silences. It is impossible to avoid my subjectivity as the artist-researcher when engaging with fandoms that they are external to, and of navigations of histories of trauma and archival ghosts. At the heart of this research, therefore, is the question of who gets to construct our cultural histories, who adds to their mythologies, whose voices are missing from these stories. This research enquiry is therefore intended to be useful to a wide range of researchers working with communities (of identity, of geography, of interest) and their histories: whether from history, sociology, visual art, socially engaged art, performance, fan, popular culture, or cultural memory studies.

METHODOLOGY

Art Practice

This research project stems first and foremost from my practice as an artist. This practice investigates contemporary mythmaking, often exploring popular culture and its associated idiosyncratic subcultures. My work has frequently sought to complicate narratives by re-performing them, whether to shine a light on hidden histories or by using absurdism and failure to undermine dominant histories. Past works have engaged with personae such as Harry Houdini, Robert Falcon Scott, Francis Drake, Arnold Schwarzenegger and William ‘Buffalo Bill’ Cody; as well as with social trends such as ‘tombstoning’ (teenagers jumping off cliffs into the sea), Mexican telenovelas, 1980s-‘90s action films, roller derby girls, Western movies, scouting, and motivational speaking. There is an attraction to and use of ‘do it yourself’ aesthetics and techniques explored within the work, which often manifests in the practice’s presentation.

I work across media, and the artwork may take the form of live performances, photographs, sculpture, text, events and actions, performances to camera, sound works and props; I use whichever medium seems most appropriate for the content and context of the work, often using more than one presentation method. This ‘versioning’ approach means that artworks may have numerous iterations including performance, photography, text, video, bookwork, or dissemination online. The malleability of the presentation methods of each artwork is intended to undermine hierarchies and binaries of ‘liveness’ and ‘documentation’; no one aspect of the artwork is intended to be dominant.⁹

⁹ I use Jeremy Deller’s (2001) *The Battle of Orgreave* project as an example of this way of working. It could be engaged with via the live reenactment, a bookwork and audio CD, a television documentary about the work, via text and image within a gallery space, and via text and image online. Divisions between the different forms the work may take are played upon; the work does not derive primarily from one form, with all others subservient to the originary moment. The works’ mediums change, as do their audiences (live, incidental, participatory,

As with my previous work, each artwork made for this PhD makes use of multiple presentation methods. This is particularly of note in relation to the works *raremjvideos1*, discussed in Chapter Four, and *Like A Pantomime*, discussed in Chapter Five. Each of these has been exhibited in at least three different versions, and I will be outlining this in detail later in the Introduction. This (re-)versioning technique is inherently fannish, and is a method of making I examine further in the thesis. Reiteration is key to the artworks' development, which mirrors the use of repetition within fan practices.

Practice-research

My practice-research methodology involves thinking, questioning, and finding out by making - and is most commonly found within performance and fine art fields. As my main research aim is to investigate process-driven similarities between fan and art practices which engage with historical narratives, in this thesis I work with artistic methods of making used by fan artists and contemporary artists. These include appropriation and postproduction techniques - for example, video making with archival footage, cut up and collage techniques of text, and installation and curatorial interventions - and take the form of zines, banners, fanvids,¹⁰ fansubs,¹¹ and fannish archiving processes. I also use performance methods, which include devising collaboratively with actors, verbatim techniques, and working with tutorial videos as additional 'scripts'. In particular, like many fanworks, an extant narrative (in my case, a historical, rather than a fictive one, revolving around Michael Jackson's visits to Devon) is

gallery, online etc). This non-medium specificity to art practice is indicative of the post-conceptual approach of my practice and other artworks that I may be analysing.

¹⁰ A fanvid or vid is a video edit of television or film footage which is often set to music. They are made by fans, often to tell a story or make an argument. (Fanlore, 2015, online).

¹¹ A fansub is a video which has been subtitled by a fan for other fans, so that they can engage in the content if they aren't familiar with the original language content (Fanlore, 2017b, online).

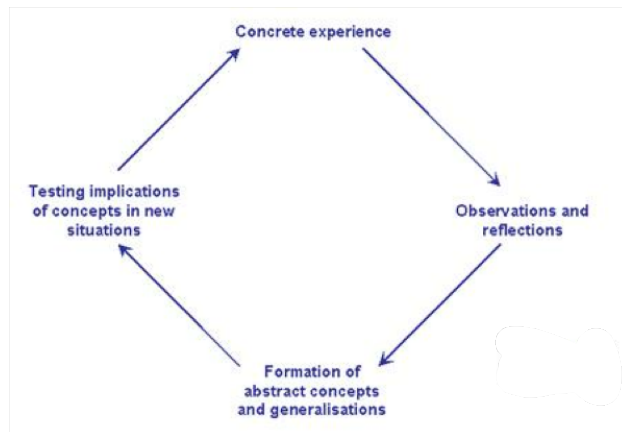
used as a starting point for making new creative work. This iterative strategy is used to analyse the methods through which fanworks are made. In other words, fan practices are *both* the subject *and*, in their critical reproduction, the method of this doctoral research project.

In this project, knowledge is generated by using play and experimentation through practice as a method of inquiry (Nelson, 2009:121). I use the term *practice-research* rather than practice-as-research as I feel that practice-as-research positions the research findings over and above the practice functioning as artwork (for me as maker and for audiences). My practice-research methodology follows the model created by Robin Nelson (2010) for mixed mode research in the arts. Nelson's work is informed by performance studies, visual cultures, and critical theory fields and he argues that we can organise knowledge into three types to create a rigorous framework for practice-research projects. These types of knowledge are:

1. Practitioner knowledge; embodied knowing, or skill. This is demonstrated in this thesis by my experimenting, making, analysing, and exhibiting artworks as practice-research.
2. An awareness of the practitioners' own practice within the context of the work and processes of other relevant practitioners. Other practitioners' work that I consider include Jeremy Deller, Jamie Shovlin, Mark Leckey. In this thesis I contextualise my practice within this sphere of art-making (broadly, post-conceptual, post-medium specific, and engaging with extant narratives) and consider fannish modes within their work. However, in addition to contemporary artists, other practitioners considered in this thesis include fans, filmmakers and/or performers.
3. A familiarity with appropriate critical frameworks and theoretical discourses. I demonstrate this in this thesis by working with relevant theories and frameworks from performance, fine art, socially engaged art, cultural memory, fan, and popular culture

studies.

This project employs a cyclical process akin to Kolb's Experiential Learning Model (1975) whereby my practice both answers my research questions and always poses new ones:



Although conceptualised for pedagogical uses, this cyclical knowledge generating process can also be applied to creative practice: analysing practice by and during its making, and through the writing of text after. My artworks are open and responsive to sites, audiences and the unexpected aspects of making work live in the world, not in a vacuum. This approach also acknowledges that 'hygienic research' – the notion of a neutral researcher who accesses and represents an objective reality (Flesher Fominaya, 2010) – is unrealistic. In this thesis, I attempt to be self-reflexive about my subjectivity throughout the research process.

My practice-research methodology also employs discourses, methods and approaches aligned to the different disciplines within which I am working: performance, fine art, fan studies, popular culture, history and cultural memory studies. As a whole, this thesis aims to highlight how the methodological approaches of these fields can be used by other (often) distinct

academic fields; for example, what a practice-research approach can bring to fan studies and popular culture studies, and what a fan studies critical framing can bring to performance and fine art studies. There are, additionally, smaller but significant disciplinary questions at play in the thesis; for example, what can debates in socially-engaged art offer cultural memory studies and archival practices? As I am working with narrative histories as my ‘way in’ to the practice-research, this project uses various historical research methods such as working with and in archives; engaging with the material culture of archival documents; and conducting oral history interviews.

However, my strongest methodological imperative stems from being a practising artist. Experimentation, trying things and discarding or revising them, revisiting ideas many times in many different ways - essentially playing with material and with ideas is at the heart of how I work and research. There is an element of getting lost in material and lost in stories, of considering these encounters, and then experimenting with creative and critical iterations to make sense of them. This reflects and is a response to the overload of often conflicting information found in the institutional and user-led archives I am working with, and it is often helpful to consider these strategies in relation to performance. Reiteration and repetition are central to performance studies debates: Elin Diamond (1995, p. 2) describes performance studies’ vocabulary as relying on the “re”: ‘reembody, reinscribe, reconfigure, resignify’. Diamond (1995, p. 2) states that all performance ‘embeds traces of other performances’ and Richard Schechner (2002, p. 29) describes performance as ‘restored behaviour or twice-behaved behaviour’. This thesis demonstrates that iteration, and a critical engagement with archives, is as integral to fan creative practices as to performance.

PRESENTATION METHODS

The multiple presentation methods and versions of the practice-research produced for this PhD speak to both the multiplicity of histories and the iterative strategies of fan and contemporary performance and art practices. To document the various versions/ings of my own artworks and performances for this thesis, I have created a YouTube channel, called ‘Poor Copy’ which acts as a meta-archive. It also hosts additional material that has informed the research project, including artworks (whether fan or contemporary artist-authored) that I discuss in the written element of the thesis, and also relevant additional material around the Jackson in Devon histories, and responses to my practice-research. The thesis is therefore best read digitally while connected to the internet. However, for those not able to connect to the internet, I have attached a USB memory storage device, which can be used to access the artworks and relevant material.

Presenting practice-research via YouTube arises from my research process, and is a deliberate strategy which mirrors elements of fan creative practice which I discuss throughout the thesis. There will be more discussion about the critical and contextual reasons for using YouTube in the thesis Conclusion. Here I outline the practicalities of how I link to the YouTube channel and videos throughout the written text.

Documentation of my practice-research is linked throughout the text via hyper-links in red boxes.

Example of a link to one of my practice-research outcomes, *Yes, It Really Did Happen*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X8esyXvVdQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe>

Other sources (including existing artworks, fanvids, documentation of other people's performances) are linked via hyper-links in blue boxes.

Example to a link of an artwork I discuss in the thesis but which is NOT a practice-research outcome - in this case, Mark Leckey's *Fiorucci made me Hardcore*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dS2McPYzEE&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp>

I have made use of YouTube playlists to group the practice-research outcomes, cited sources, and additional material together respectively. If the reader would like to navigate the videos in a more ordered way, I suggest making use of these playlists, or by using the text box hyperlinks as and when they arrive in the written body of the thesis.

The Poor Copy YouTube channel home page can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDmIe6Xr1aYEeBkwatQJ4Rg/featured>

However, this page only shows the videos that I have uploaded. As I am linking to other videos uploaded by artists and fans, which are hosted by other YouTube Channels, it may be easier for the reader to navigate via the Playlists section at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDmIe6Xr1aYEeBkwatQJ4Rg/playlists>

The *Poor Copies* playlist hosts documentation of the practice-research outputs of the thesis: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLc>

The *Citations* playlist hosts sources, or documentation of sources, which I cite in the thesis. These are generally artworks, performances, films, and fannish YouTube videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp>

The *Appendices* playlist hosts sources which I think is relevant to the thesis but which is not directly cited; for example, responses by artists and writers to the *Poor Copy* project, fan vlog responses to the Michael Jackson *On The Wall* exhibition, etc:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjFa1hCI7eNWol7gCB7Wmip>

Poor Copy

Poor Copy is the title of the thesis but also the umbrella title for all the practice-research made for this thesis. The title borrows from Hito Steyerl's concept of 'poor images' in her essay *In Defense of the Poor Image* (2009, online). Here she describes poor images' inherent 'copyability', which I apply to the archival fragments that I am working with. In Chapter Three I discuss this text as a lens through which to understand archival creative practices. The title of *Poor Copy* more directly comes from the microfilm archival 'censoring' as shown in the video *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, where archivists have placed A4 paper printed with the words 'POOR COPY' over presumably technically-inaccurate copies of the newspaper which the microfilm reproduces.

This section lists the practice-research made in the Poor Copy project, details their various iterations, what fannish method of making they explore, and where they were exhibited.

Banner #7 (Welome)



Marketing image for Exeter Phoenix 2016 exhibition which uses the banner work.



Banner work installed at Aspex Gallery in 2017, along with *No Such Event Took Place* and

raremjvideos1 installation.

This work engages with the fan practice of banner and placard making. It is a remake of a fan banner, which read ‘Welome’ [*sic*], that I found in video documentation of the Jackson in Exeter visit via YouTube. I used the banner within a marketing image for the 2016 Gallery 333 exhibition and performance at Exeter Phoenix (see top picture). It was also installed as artwork in *EMERGENCY*, an exhibition at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth in 2017, surveying emerging artists from across Europe. It was also exhibited at the *Poor Copy* solo exhibition at The Northern Charter, an artist-led space in Newcastle in 2018. It is discussed in Chapter Four.

Yes, It Really Did Happen (zine)



Zine work installed at Gallery 333, Exeter Phoenix with raremjvideos1 in 2016

View a ‘read through’ of the zine at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clqIP1UVC->

[M&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOlW-FL&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOlW-FL&index=7)

This work engages with the fan practice of zines. The text is the speech that Jackson gave at Exeter City Football Club. Alongside this are biro drawings of several fan banners from the event. I exhibited the zine alongside an iteration of the *raremjvideos1* work in Gallery 333 at Exeter Phoenix in 2016. It is discussed in Chapter Four.

Raremjvideos1



Version one of raremjvideos1 installed at Gallery 333, Exeter Phoenix in 2016



Version two of raremjvideos1 installed with sports stadium seating at Aspex Gallery in 2017



Version two installed at Gallery three of Jerwood Visual Arts in 2018. Image credit Hydar

Dewachi.

View the videowork at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOOtNZuCyzk&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe&index=2>

This work engages with fannish moving image practices such as fanvids and fansubs. It makes use of existing moving image appropriated from a YouTube channel titled *raremjvideos1*, which documents Jackson travelling to Exeter, and his time in Exeter after he gave the speech. Some versions also had a subtitled section with the Jackson speech text. This work had a number of versions and exhibition platforms:

- Version one was an edit with only existing footage from the raremjvideos1 YouTube channel. It was exhibited at Gallery 333 at Exeter Phoenix in 2016, next to the zine work.
- There were other, unexhibited, work-in-progress versions which used video material from other Jackson fan channels. One included edited footage of the Jackson speech with a similar aesthetic feel; another used edited additional material from an Italian Jackson fan channel which incorporated some of Jackson's music and methods of both fanvids and fansubs.
- Version two inserted the speech text after the footage of Jackson arriving at St James Park. The text is displayed with no audio-visual information behind it as subtitles: a blank black screen with the Jackson speech text at the bottom of the screen. This version was the most widely exhibited:
 - Installed with seating sculpture made from red sports stadium seating (as would be seen in St James Park), in the group exhibition *Data Ache* at Radiant Gallery, Plymouth in September 2017.

- Installed with seating sculpture in the group exhibition *EMERGENCY* at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth in December 2017 - January 2018, alongside the banner work, and the photograph and sound piece *No Such Event Took Place*.
- As a single screen showing in the cinema space at CCA, Glasgow, as part of Mount Florida Screening X PAC Home's programme for Glasgow International, May 2018.
- As a single screen showing in the cinema space at Plymouth Arts Centre, as part of Mount Florida Screening X PAC Home's programme for Plymouth Art Weekender, September 2018.
- As a single screen projection alongside all other *Poor Copy* artworks in The Northern Charter solo show in 2018.
- As a single screen projection in gallery 3 at Jerwood Visual Arts as part of my solo presentation, *Poor Copy*, part of Jerwood's *Staging Series* programme, September 2018. *Like A Pantomime* was shown in gallery 1, and *Yes, It Really Did Happen* was shown in gallery 2.

This work is discussed in Chapter Four.

No Such Event Took Place



No Such Event audio and photo work installed in Aspex Gallery, 2017



Image displayed in museum vitrine as part of No Such Event Took Place

View documentation of this work at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAeWHAA73Zo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe&index=4>

This work explores the provenance of the only image to document the Jackson in Barnstaple event. It exhibits a reproduction of the image in a museum vitrine, and plays recordings of text-to-speech of emails and phone call transcripts from me to people who were linked to the Barnstaple event and to the image. It was exhibited at Aspex Gallery as part of the 2017 *EMERGENCY* exhibition and in the Northern Charter *Poor Copy* solo exhibition in 2018.

This work is discussed in Chapter Three.

Yes, It Really Did Happen



Yes, It Really Did Happen, installed in Gallery two at Jerwood Visual Arts, 2018

View this video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X8esyXvVdQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe&index=1>

This work explores making space for fannish intervention in institutional archives and documents. It shows footage of the microfilm archives of the *Exeter Express and Echo's* coverage of the Jackson in Exeter event. This work was exhibited as a single channel projection in Gallery Two at Jerwood Visual Arts as part of my solo presentation there in 2018. It was also shown at The Northern Charter exhibition in 2018. It is discussed in Chapter Three.

Like A Pantomime



Documentation of *Like A Pantomime* at Jerwood Visual Arts Gallery one, 2018. Image

credits: Hydar Dewachi.

This work explores verbatim theatre practices as a way to engage with fan historiographies. It also engages with fan tutorial YouTube videos. It used existing and new oral histories from fan communities to platform memories of the two Jackson in Devon histories. There were a number of versions which were significantly different from one another:

- The first version was shown at Exeter Phoenix as a live event which related to the Gallery 333 exhibition. This work was performed by Matt Reeves, Sally Burne, and Brantley Rogers. These actors were integral to the work's devising. The performance was in two parts: the first part used verbatim dialogue from both Exeter City and Jackson fans which recalled their understandings and experiences of Michael Jackson's Exeter visit. The second part re-enacted the Jackson speech.

View documentation of this performance at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKvNmLTIUd0&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=3>

- The second version was shown as a work in progress at a Plymouth Arts Centre residency finissage event¹², and at the *Poor Copy* Northern Charter exhibition. This version was in three sections. The first used verbatim recollections of the 'Jackson' Barnstaple gig as spoken text, while the actors Sara Versi and George Lovesmith followed and performed a Jackson dance tutorial YouTube video, projected opposite them (with no audio from the video). The second section used verbatim recollections of the Jackson in Exeter event as dialogue, while performing a Jackson make up tutorial YouTube video, projected opposite them (with no audio from the video). The

¹² A finissage is a public event at the end of a residency or exhibition, often sharing new artworks with the public or an invited audience.

third section projected a fan-filmed video of the Jackson in Exeter speech which was projected with sound. The actors lipsynched to this and re-performed every movement the video showed Jackson performing.

View documentation of a rehearsal of this version at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWfdf8rCl8&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=6>

- The third version was shown in the *Poor Copy* Jerwood Visual Arts exhibition. This version was performed by Sara Versi and Matt Reeves. This was a two hour performance in Gallery One of Jerwood, an eleven minute performance script that was repeated throughout the evening's presentation. Versi and Reeves spoke verbatim dialogue of remembrances of the Exeter in Jackson event. Opposite them was projected the Jackson dance tutorial which they imitated.

View documentation of a rehearsal of this version at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_Sh66gV0wo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=5

This work is discussed in Chapter Five.

COLLABORATORS, PARTICIPANTS, AUDIENCES, AND ETHICS

Much of my practice is collaborative and I have credited my collaborators and participants in each artwork via URL and in the written element of the thesis. Artworks made with other people – variously described as socially-engaged art, new genre public art, and community-specific art, amongst other labels (Kwon, 2004, p.1) – bring to the fore ethical implications,

and considerations of power relations involved in participation, collaboration, and collectivity. I discuss this throughout the thesis, and particularly in Chapter Five.

The emphasis on participation, collaboration and co-authorship of new artworks with different communities calls for an examination of the dynamics of these different models of working, and how artists, including myself, negotiate this. Working with others is central to my practice: using Paul James' (2006) taxonomy of communities, communities can be geographically-based, identity-based, or interest-based. I see these contributors as other creative practitioners (although they may not call themselves that) with particular expertise, knowledges, and viewpoints to bring to the making of the work. This may manifest by being an oral history interviewee (for example, a member of a fan community), by contributing to the devising of a performance (for example, an actor as collaborator), or by giving feedback on works-in-progress (for example, an audience member).

Arts audiences have engaged with the practice and its ideas at a number of exhibitions and presentations which are listed at the beginning of the written element of the thesis. Discussion groups after work-in-progress showings have been particularly productive for myself as maker and, I hope, for the audience. Having been able to invite two artist-writers - Owen G Parry and Johanna Linsley - to respond to the project was also an invaluable tool for the practice-research, in both reaching more audiences and helping me think through my research findings via discussions with them.

I have conducted research interviews with members of fan communities, eyewitnesses to particular sited histories, and performers that have collaborated with me. Data collection and storage of these follows University of Plymouth protocol; for example, following the terms of

the Data Protection Act; password securing digital files on an online cloud system; informed consent and confidentiality for quoting and representing individuals in my thesis. Ethical approval was granted by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

DEFINITIONAL DIFFERENCES

Throughout the research process I interrogate my position as artist-researcher in relation to each historical narrative, and to each community which engages with that narrative. It is also important to note that I do not conduct an ethnographic study of these fan communities, rather I engage with them as case studies for analysing fan historiographies, and as practitioners of fan art practices. In fan studies, in particular, there are existing debates on academic engagements around cultural properties and their fandoms. I strive to be mindful of self-identification as fan/non-fan/artist/academic/participant/observer within this body of research, and within my engagement with the various fan communities and their performances and cultural outputs. This is discussed in further detail throughout the thesis, with a particular focus in Chapter Five.

Contemporary art and performance studies are beginning to pay more attention to fan practitioners and modes of making - see *Fandom as Methodology*, edited by Catherine Grant and Kate Random Love (2019), and *Fanspeak*, a group exhibition curated by the Shy Bairns collective at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester (2019), which platforms work which 'reinterprets or mimics fan culture' (in which my artwork is included). This thesis follows this inherent interdisciplinarity, engaging with analytical frameworks and ideas from performance, visual art, fan, popular culture, history, and folklore studies. As such, there are certain terms and definitional differences across disciplines; I discuss my understanding and use of key terms such as 'archive' and 'producerly' here in the introduction to the thesis and

throughout in footnotes for clarification. I also make use of language idiomatic to fan studies and online fan communities, which may be traditionally read in an academic text as colloquial or slang; however, it is appropriate to discuss fandoms using the language they speak of themselves. To help the reader navigate this, I include a short glossary of fannish terms which I use:

- Aca-fan - Matt Hills (2002) popularized this term to mean a person whose primary identity is academic, and secondary is that of fan. In contrast, a fan scholar's primary identity is that of a fan, academic is second.
- Canon - within fandom, this means texts that are considered authoritative by a fan community. The term came from Sherlock Holmes fandom when a 1911 essay compared Holmes stories to that of the Bible. Different sources may be considered canonical within a fandom (Fanlore, 2019a, online).
- Fanac - slang term within fan communities to mean any fannish activities, such as creating fan art or fanfic, attending conventions, taking part in fannish discussions, etc (Bloch, 1957).
- Fanfiction - also known as fanfic or fic, a work of fiction which takes an existing source text or famous person as its starting point. Usually written by fans for other fans (Fanlore, 2019d, online).
- Fansub - a video which has been subtitled by a fan for other fans, so that they can engage in the content if they aren't familiar with the original language content (Fanlore, 2017b, online). This is discussed further in Chapter Four.
- Originary - I use this term, rather than original, as originary's multiple meanings underscore the producerly elements of archival texts. As well as meaning original, it also means something that is inherently productive, yielding new existences (Websters, 2019, online). This term is also used within fan studies, and I am specifically

referencing Abigail De Kosnik's use: "[T]here is a constant state of flux, of shifting and chaotic relation, between new versions of stories and the originary texts: the fics written about a particular source text ensure the text is never solidified, calcified, or at rest" (2006, p. 76–77).

- Problematic fave - a problematic fave is a fan object which has demonstrated "problematic" (for example, sexist, racist, ageist, ableist, transphobic etc) behaviours, but who the fan still feels passionately about (Fanlore, 2019b, online). This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.
- Vidding - the act of making a fan created 'fanvid' or 'vid', editing existing TV or film footage (Fanlore, 2017c, online). This is discussed further in Chapter Four.
- Versioning - Abigail De Kosnik develops Dick Hebdige's term 'versioning' to encapsulate reworkings of extant texts across performance, fan fiction, and software development. Each new version or (re)production gives new contexts and meanings to the originary: 'Versioning is what happens when you have something to say in your repertoire, and you play it, your way' (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 304). This is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Archival impulses

My practice-research is undertaken through a feminist lens, underpinned by a poststructural questioning of singularities, authenticity and essentialism. The poststructural premise is that texts do not have an 'essential' meaning; rather, there is no one correct 'reading' of literature, historical accounts, documentary images, artworks and performances. In *Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes refutes the notion of a 'final signified' (1977, 145-148); texts (which here I read as any narrative, whether lexical or performative) hold a multiplicity of meanings with no inherent 'authentic' signified. The reader's subjectivity is as much the meaning-creator as the

author; connotations are unfixed and in flux at the moment of reception. This notion is integral to critical and creative iterative practices, and opens up the invitation for the creative practitioner to take ownership of the text and re-write it. Critical and creative iterative practices are less concerned with factual accuracy, historical detail or performance mimesis; instead, they aim to offer a more fluid reading of a narrative in order to deconstruct it, revealing the power structures used to create it and which it consolidates. Similarly, history is recognised as a ‘construction site’ that is manipulated and re-constructed by each historian’s narrative (Jenkins in Blackson, 2007, p. 31). As Marvin Carlson notes, ‘our reconstructions of history are fragmentary, incomplete, subjective’ (2000, p. 246).

Archives are central to this research project; I analyse how different fan communities construct, access, share and interpret archives, contrasting this with more traditional institutional archives and their holdings. There are two distinct yet related readings of archive which act as a starting point. Artist and writer Allan Sekula positions the archive as a body of physical and digital documents: a quantitative ensemble of images and texts as seen in photographic theory (Sekula, 2003, pp. 443 – 447). This reading of the archive relates to the tension between documentation and performance within contemporary art. For philosopher Michel Foucault, the archive is an organisation of information, not only reproducing but producing meaning and power (Foucault, 1991, pp. 191 – 192). This reading positions the archive as integral to historical and political discourse. Both definitions understand that archives are never neutral, serving as a kind of ‘clearing house’ of meaning in which to manipulate and supplant interpretations (Sekula, 2003, p. 445; Foucault, 2002, p. 188).

Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and Derrida’s *Archive Fever* were the catalyst for the ‘postmodern turn’ in archival sciences (Van Alphen, 2014, p. 13). For both, archives are

more than a material construct, but also a metaphorical one, which help them to interrogate ideas around knowledge, thinking, memory, and power. Foucault's emphasis is on 'what can be said': a set of discursive rules which is a 'system that establishes statements as events and things' (Foucault in Van Alphen, pp. 12-13). From this we can see how archives are not passive but active in meaning-making. This relates to Foucault's 'regimes of truth': an important notion for an artistic (or fannish) engagement with archives (especially via a poststructural, decolonial, and feminist lens), problematising as it does the idea of an essential veracity. 'Truth', as Foucault frames it, is a 'system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements' (1976, pp. 113-114): statements housed within archives, which can be established as events and things. Truth is linked by 'systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to the effects of power which it induces and which redirect it' (1976, pp. 113-114). The systems of power include archives; the people who add to, maintain, and curate archives; and how archives and archival material are disseminated. 'Power which it induces' can be read as the narratives archives are able to transmit, and 'which redirects it' can be read as an artistic or fannish (mis)use of archival material.

In performance studies, there are several distinct readings of archive. Peggy Phelan's influential thesis that 'performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive' (1993, p.148) sets up a quasi-binary between liveness and documentation. Philip Auslander questions this oppositional nature between performance and its reproduction, in part due to the growing dominance of mass media. He argues that artworks in which the relationship between lens-based media and liveness are integral, derive presence and power not from:

treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving *the document itself as a performance* that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience. (Auslander, 2006, p. 9, my emphasis)

Auslander's treatment of the document, and archival material more generally, places an emphasis on the receivers, not the producers of the work, which relates to the open and 'producerly' exchange between fan as audience/ fan as creator and source text. Both playfully undermine the idea of the original, instead re-thinking this as an *originary*.

From these perspectives, we can see that archives are no longer understood as passive guardians of historical knowledge, but instead are active agents that shape personal identity and cultural memory (Van Alphen, p. 14). Fans and artists see the potential in the malleability of archives and archival material, using it for their own means to create new 'statements', new 'events', new 'things'; to create, change, or build on histories, mythologies and identities.

Fan engagements with archives are often curatorial in nature, and involve uploading and maintaining information relating to their object of interest. This fan labour is called 'techno-volunteerism' by fan and performance studies scholar Abigail De Kosnik, who argues that fannish methods of digital archiving actually helps form our 'digital cultural memory' (2016, p. 54). 'Rogue' memory workers - amateurs, fans, hackers, pirates, and volunteers - have enthusiastically embraced digital archiving, often designing and running their own cultural memory institutions without waiting for traditional institutions to set any precedents in this field. De Kosnik characterizes 'rogue archives' as having: constant availability; no barriers to access; free streamed or downloadable content; no copyright restrictions; content that would likely never be in a traditional memory institution (2016, pp. 1-2).¹³ I use these 'rogue archives' as reference points for the construction of the presentation of my practice-research in an online

¹³ De Kosnik does not include YouTube, Tumblr, or Wikipedia in her understanding of rogue archives; all, though user-generated, do not meet all her criteria. For example, YouTube frequently deletes content due to copyright complaints. YouTube and online fan forums are among the archives I am using in my practice research, and I will discuss their properties and influence on the work in further detail later in this thesis.

‘meta-archive’ (discussed in the thesis Conclusion).

Performance scholar Heike Roms (in Borggreen and Gade, 2013, pp. 35-53) also emphasises the care and passion required when archiving, though her focus is on archiving performance: she understands the archive as an extension of the artwork and as a collaborative practice. Roms and De Kosnik position archives as inherently linked with interest-based communities (rather than solely with ‘memory-institutions’). They also both refute the traditional notion of archival material as ‘lost’ to us, as ‘past’, instead suggesting that an archives’ holdings are re-performed by the archivists. For instance, Roms states that ‘an archive [is] constituted through a continual performance of collaborative practices of care’ (Roms in Borggreen and Gade, 2013, p. 48). According to De Kosnik, ‘archiving with digital technologies requires human *enactment* of the archivist’s repertoire’ (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 54).

This dismantling of the binary of archive/live is also developed in Rebecca Schneider’s *Performing Remains* (2011), along with authentic/mimetic and present/past, both pertinent to this body of research. Schneider characterizes performance as that which remains, rather than Peggy Phelan’s defining characteristic as ‘disappearance’, as discussed above. Schneider discusses Mary Kelly’s use of an archival photograph of a protest march to put forward her notion of the multi-temporality of art:

[W]e might think of the *circulation* of event, the procession of event in nonlinear time, as a durational scene of inter(in)animate enactment passed on as much by documents or objects operating as scriptive things as by persons passing them on, or around in the affective field of the ghost jump. (2013, p. 178)

This passage relates the multi-temporality of artworks engaging with the past, and is reminiscent of creative fan practices which engage with archives. Here we see the *circulation*

of narratives; documents as *scriptive*, (and I would argue) as producerly; the accretions of meaning through a networked transmission; and, histories as malleable and reproducible.

De Kosnik's (2006) chapter 'Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction' also engages with temporality in innovative ways. In it, she positions fan fiction as a literature *of* archives, using Derrida's *Archive Fever* to explore the archive as 'always expanding and never closed', where every addition to the archive alters what the archive itself constitutes (p. 61). She explores Derrida's uses of the term 'archons' to refer to who controls the structures within and without archives through which meaning is created and disseminated. De Kosnik's *Rogue Archives* (2016) continues this line of thought, arguing that in contemporary digital society, the new 'archons' of digital archives are readers, filmgoers, gamers, and viewers - traditionally conceived as audiences, not producers. Fannish audiences engage deeply with the archive of media culture, extract what interests them, and use these 'extractions' as 'raw materials' for their own cultural productions, such as fanfic. These contemporary archons not only interpret, but produce archives. This fannish production is termed 'archontic production' (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 34).

Archontic production also problematizes the balance of power between archive and repertoire. De Kosnik uses Diana Taylor's influential performance studies text *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) to make explicit how repertoire works in metaphorical and material archives. For Taylor, repertoire 'enacts embodied memory' including performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing (2003, p.20). De Kosnik builds on this, and states that humans are 'playback machines' that record what they experience, and 'play back' those experiences, transforming them in the process. 'Reperformers' might include a music fan singing in the shower, a child pretending to be a superhero, a theatre company staging a musical; all

individuals who have drawn the source text into their repertoires. Cultural producers working in recorded or archival forms also do this, using their bodies (their fingers and wrists interfacing with keyboards, their eyes and ears gauging inputs and outputs) to reperform the originary sources they have stored (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 7).

De Kosnik relates a culture's canon to a culture's repertoire. Whatever is reiterated, reperformed, restated, and reembodied by individuals of a culture, over time, comprises that culture's canon. Narratives that fail to be reproduced, that drop out of the repertoire, are 'forgotten': exiting the canon and entering the archive. Texts are malleable, and can move from the unperformed archive and the performed canon: 'canon = texts + performance' (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 66). Fans' authorial, collaborative engagement with archives can construct 'personal canons'; they reject the notion of definitive meta-narratives, of hegemonic canons and ideologies. Instead, fans participate in the creation and circulation of cultural myths (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 267).

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

I have begun to identify similarities between how fan creative practitioners and contemporary art and performance practitioners engage with archived and extant narratives, and will be investigating these methods' relationships with cultural memory. By using the Jackson in Devon histories as a narrative throughline, I will be asking: how might art-making processes and products foster, embrace and represent activities that empower participants (artists, fans, and audiences) to create, change or build on dominant histories and mythologies?

Chapter One lays the foundation to the thesis by mapping existing concurrencies (and contrasts) between fan studies and performance studies, and suggesting future potential

interdisciplinary understandings. I do this by analysing the mode of ‘tribute’ as an embodied iterative creative practice, with reference to Elvis tribute artists. I discuss findings from my participation in the Live Art Development Agency workshop ‘Probing Elvis’ (2013), including a visit to Europe’s largest Elvis lookalike-competition, *The Elvies* in Porthcawl, South Wales, and a practice-experiment, *Vaseline and Rose Oil* (2013), made as part of *Experimentica* at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff. These artworks and performances lay the groundwork for my investigations into enacting, reenacting, and performing fan communities and their historiographies. I begin to position fan methods of making as producerly, and show that producerly practices can perform cultural memory and act as personal creative outlet.

In Chapter Two, I consider Michael Jackson to reveal further complications of tribute and re(-)presentation. Although I am using Jackson in Devon histories as a case study to investigate my wider research aims through practice, rather than as the subject of the thesis per se, some attention needs to be paid to how Jackson’s narratives (particularly narratives of re-presenting, tributing and/or doubling Jackson) have been used within contemporary cultural practices. To do so, I analyse Harmony Korine’s 2007 film *Mister Lonely*, sociologist-photographer Lorena Turner’s 2014 bookwork *The Michael Jacksons*, the unaired Sky Arts *Urban Myths* television show featuring Joseph Fiennes as Jackson, photographer Owen Logan and writer Uzoa Maxim Uzoa’s photo-essay *Masquerade: Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria (2001-2005)*, and the posthumous ‘hologram’ performance ‘by’ Jackson at the 2014 Billboard Music Awards. I position Jackson as a fan object as ‘problematic fave’, and how this affects the dissemination of his cultural narratives. I discuss this via the staging of the *Michael Jackson: On The Wall* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, London (2018) and the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany (2019), and its reception before and after the airing of the *Leaving Neverland* documentary (2019).

Chapter Three asks whether there is space for fannish engagements with documents within institutional archives. It discusses my use of the microfilm archives of the *Exeter Express and Echo* papers at the Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter, and the image archive and microfilm archive of the *North Devon Journal* in the North Devon Record Office, Barnstaple to create new artworks which explore the spatial, material, aesthetic, and linguistic properties of institutional archives and their documents. My video work, *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, explores whether and how fannish methods of making can be employed within institutions, and considers if or how these institutional archives construct and constrain the notion of a historical canon. A photograph and sound installation, *No Such Event Took Place*, offers a deeper analysis into notions of photographic indexicality and journalistic and documentary ‘truth’ and authorship. Through these works I also analyse how global celebrity texts are translated into local news media, becoming hyper-local urban legend.

In Chapter Four, I investigate similarities between fan and contemporary art producerly modes of making, surveying works by artists Jamie Shovlin and Mark Leckey. I explore fan and user-led digital archives, via fan creative practices such as vidding, fansubbing, banner and zine making. I position fan archival practices as a cyclical and productive methodology of working with historical narratives. I discuss the making of my video work *raremjvideos1*, an accompanying zine and textile banner sculpture, and detail how they make use of and unpack fan creative practices. I demonstrate how fanac opens up a space for creative practitioners to subvert and affirm star myths, and by doing so simultaneously appropriate from, contribute to, and disseminate fan archives.

Chapter Five positions verbatim theatre practices as a specific, valuable practice-research tool when working with communities of interest. I discuss the various versions of *Like a Pantomime*, a performance which platforms the oral histories of the Jackson in Exeter and Jackson in Barnstaple events, by Exeter City football fans and Michael Jackson fans. I analyse the ethics and politics of using new oral history interviews and existing data to inform the work, and to explore the cultural memories and historiographies of two very different fan communities. I discuss my different working relationships between the different fan communities, to reflect on issues of fan advocacy agendas, and how trauma is present and absent within oral histories and other archives. Fan archival practices are key to the myth-making of the fan-object. This chapter, at the culmination of the thesis, investigates the ways in which fan narratives are constructed and disseminated when they are part of a contentious history that fans may prefer to forget.

CHAPTER ONE

BETWEEN MIMICRY AND DIFFERENCE: PERFORMING ELVIS(ES)

Lookalike. Tribute artist. Impersonator. Mimic. Body double. Decoy. Stand-in. These are just some of the terms that describe someone performing as somebody else. Lookalikes, tribute artists and impersonators have been under-researched by performance scholars, strangely so as they embody many key postmodern and poststructural ideas of dualities and multiplicities. As the question of whether Jackson or a Jackson tribute performed is key to the histories I am using as a narrative nexus point for the thesis, in this chapter I analyse the performance mode of tribute and its links with repetition, notions of the ‘real’, and of the originary. I examine how tribute artists reiterate mythic histories of pop cultural icons and their relationships with audiences; create, enact and reperform fan communities; and construct and deconstruct the fannish notion of ‘transformation’. I use the method of an applied literature review to do this: reflecting and building on key texts in relation to some of my own performance experiences (as audience member, participant, and maker) which have led me to investigate the performance of ‘tribute’. Sociologist-photographer Lorena Turner, sociologist Kerry O. Ferris and artist-researcher Owen G. Parry’s ideas around re-presentation will act as starting points for analysis of my participation in the Live Art Development Agency workshop ‘Probing Elvis’ (2013), including a visit to Europe’s largest Elvis lookalike-competition *The Elvies* in Porthcawl, South Wales, and participating in *Experimentica* at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff: two moments that laid the groundwork for my investigations into enacting, re-enacting, and performing fan communities and their shared histories. I begin to use a methodological approach of practice-research to understand fan communities’ practices that I as artist-researcher may be (at least initially) a ‘visitor’ to. I analyse my experiences as both audience member and artist-researcher to unpack how tribute works as an embodied fan performance

mode. I apply theoretical frameworks from performance, sociology, and fan studies fields to do so, including Parry's "fictional realness", John Fiske's "producerly texts", and Erving Goffman's "frame analysis". By doing this, I map similarities and differences of performance studies and fan studies approaches to tribute and their fan communities, and start to suggest new interdisciplinary methodological interventions in these fields.

A Taxonomy of Tribute

While tribute has not been widely researched in performance studies, the fields of sociology and popular culture studies offers fascinating insights into tribute. Here I outline some of their key findings, some of which I use as a framework for analysing the tribute performances at the Elvies throughout this chapter. As there are scores of different approaches to celebrity impersonation – whether a focus on the look, voice, dance, the whole package or a more niche aspect of the celebrity originary – so there are many different terms for the performers, each with slightly different nuances. Sociologist and photographer Lorena Turner's bookwork *The Michael Jacksons* (2014) gives the most comprehensive categorisation of the different models of lookalikes, via a topographical survey of North American Michael Jackson impersonators in all their mutable iterations.

Turner (2014, pp. 122-128) calls this wide genre of performance 'representers'. Noting, as above, that there are numerous models of representation, which can be influenced by the performers' own social histories and physical legacies, these can be broadly categorized as: *lookalikes*, *impersonators* and *tribute artists*. Lookalikes' performances are based strongly on a physical resemblance to the celebrity. They may not be required to act, dance or sing like the celebrity they are portraying. Their work often includes simply walking around 'as' the celebrity, having photos taken with people, and engaging in 'meet and greets' where they will

probably repeat stock phrases (2002, p. 122). Impersonators also bear a strong physical resemblance to the celebrity they are representing, but will engage in more active mimicry: whether song, dance or representing famous film scenes. They will likely have made a careful study of the celebrity they are representing, and may engage in improvised conversation with the audience as the celebrity. They command a higher appearance fee than a lookalike. Impersonators also refer to themselves as illusionists (2002, p. 123). Tribute artists possess a high degree of representational skill, and the tribute artists Turner interviewed were slightly scornful of lookalikes and impersonators. The term tribute artist suggests a high degree of ‘professionalism’ in the representation, along with a deep admiration, even devotion, to the celebrity that they are attempting to embody. By literally paying tribute to the originary, these representers are freer to play with the performances of celebrities in more individual and imaginative ways (2002, p. 123).

Sociologist Kerry O. Ferris’s article (2010) ‘Ain’t Nothing But The Real Thing, Baby: Framing Celebrity Impersonator Performances’ expands on the relationships between representer and audience, using ethnographic and interview data to examine how impersonators and their audiences collaborate to build an interactional boundary within which the real and unreal of performer identities coexist. Ferris uses Erving Goffman’s (1974, 1961) “framing” to examine the relationship between impersonators and audience; using the concept of frame analysis which argues that making sense of social situations is done by constructing meaning through frames of understanding. Ferris uses a Goffmanian framing to signal the audience’s suspension of disbelief (that the impersonator IS the celebrity) and simultaneous acceptance of the ‘deception’ (that the impersonator is a stand-in): an interplay of reality and fantasy.

To date, most scholarship around tribute has come via a popular culture lens. Media and cultural studies academic Shane Homan (2006) draws together thinking on tribute bands in *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture*. Some key themes he explores which resonate with Turner's research include: tribute as construction of musical simulacra; how tribute texts reinforce or challenge musical historical narratives; the role (and role-playing) of fans within the frame of tribute; tribute's challenge to the music industry's discourses of 'authenticity'.

Media and film scholar Georgina Gregory (2012) surveys a cultural study of tribute bands in 'Send In The Clones'. Gregory celebrates tribute's role in championing the live event rather than digital consumption of music, asserting that it creates spaces for engagement and collective experiences and practices, as well as pragmatically a sphere for musicians to earn a living in a saturated marketplace. Gregory also analyses tribute's audiences, and states that one of the notable qualities of tribute is its fan-led ethos, where divisions between performers and audience are blurred - often, both are fans.

Fan scholar Matt Hills' (2002) chapter 'Cult Bodies' (in his monograph *Fan Cultures*) examines the role of the fan's body within costuming and impersonation practices. He introduces the term 'performative consumption' (2002, p. 158-159) to capture the contradictions between 'use-value' and 'exchange-value' which fan culture represents and stages via tribute (2002, p. 171). The term also refers to the dialectic between 'self-reflexivity' and 'self-absence' performed by tribute (2002, p. 171). He thus positions tribute as a method of fan labour which highlights the possibility of the simultaneity of tribute - performing both as fan and as fan-subject.

The Elvies: Frame, Game, and Play in Porthcawl

In 2013 I participated in a Live Art Development Agency DIY workshop entitled ‘Probing Elvis’. This artist-led workshop was developed by Nigel Barratt and Louise Mari of Shunt theatre company, and aimed to give performance-makers the chance to reflect on our own practices by exploring the working methods and performances of tribute artists (Barratt and Mari, 2013, online). We began by meeting at The Elvies, the largest Elvis tribute artist competition and festival in Europe, taking place in Porthcawl, a small seaside town in South Wales. The other workshop participants came from a diverse background of making, but our interest all coalesced around the idea of performing as someone recognized as a cultural icon, and how to re-present this to new audiences. Few of us were actual Elvis fans – to be honest at that time I couldn’t name you more than a handful of his most famous songs.

Our first action as a group was to attend some of the performances. While wandering towards the venue of the Elvis competition, Porthcawl Pavillion Theatre, we realized how outnumbered we were by Elvis lookalikes; fans dressed as their idol regardless of whether they were performing, and representing him with varying degrees of success. For the super-fans of Elvis gathering here in South Wales, the urge to mimic him seemed a compulsion. Once within the theatre, the level of professionalism and commitment to ‘becoming’ Elvis by the impersonators became clear. The tens of performers we saw were all excellent entertainers in their own right, in a sometimes bizarre end-of-pier way. We saw the current youngest ever Elvis representer perform; there were Elvis’ with dodgy voices but incredible dancing; there were gospel-singing Elvies; there were sex gods, there were caricatures, there were Elvies who were older than Elvis ever lived to be. In short, just about every iteration of Elvis you could imagine was there, competing for awards such as the ‘Gold Lame Jacket’, ‘Best ’68 Special’, ‘Best Movie Elvis’,

‘Best Gospel Elvis’, ‘Best Vegas Elvis’ and, like any good awards ceremony, the ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’.

Something strange happened as the evening’s performances wore on. As we got to the finals of the competition, our workshop group began to behave like fans. We shoved our way to the front of the stage, covertly elbowing out the crowd already gathered. Unlike them, we didn’t know the words to every song. We hadn’t been following this particular lookalike’s fortunes on the Elvis tribute artist (or ETA) circuit. But we cheered and whooped as if we were watching the real deal. When Gordon Davis performed his category-winning Vegas-era set, workshop pals and I were even jumping up and down to be on the receiving end of very sweaty kisses from his on-stage Elvis. How did we, seeming non-fans, come to act and perform as screaming Elvis fans while Davis performed Elvis?

Both performer and audience here worked together to co-create Elvis, within a frame where we both recognize the imitation or ‘fakery’, and suspend that recognition within the performance. Within the Porthcawl Pavillion, Elvis performers and audience mutually locate and construct a ‘distinctive interpretative frame’ (Goffman, 1974, p. 26) in which we accept a hybrid performance of fantasy and reality. As Ferris states in her ethnographic research of celebrity impersonators, this frame creates a collaborative and conspiratorial game between performer and audience (Ferris, 2010 p.60). The Elvies audience’s tacit agreement to overlook aesthetic, cultural and performance accuracy of the performers’ manifestations of Elvis ensured that we stayed within the impersonation frame, an example of rules of irrelevance within the ‘play’ of The Elvies. For Goffman, the rule of irrelevance encompasses what is and is not attended to within a given encounter or frame. His example is a board game which can use either bottle tops or gold figurines as playing pieces. The structure’s ‘obligations [are] fulfilled

and expectations realized' (1961, p.11) regardless of the physical and aesthetic attributes. If we continually pointed out discrepancies in the Elvis re-presentations – 'he didn't have that paunch in 1968'; 'that was a bum note'; 'call that a hip gyration?' – we would be dismantling the rules of the game, as well as being quite a mean audience.

When we were vying for 'Elvis'' attention in front of the stage, everyone in the theatre was accepting of the 'deception' of the impersonators as Elvis, while simultaneously we all acknowledged that no one was deceived. It was a performance game that enabled us to engage in an uncynical and naïve viewership, while we performed as fans. We wanted to be 'fooled', even though we never truly were, mirroring Richard Schechner's argument that audiences must be engaged in the 'play' of a performance (Schechner, 2006, pp.103-104). The audience became co-conspirators, willing Elvis onto the stage, enabling the transformation of the performer from Elvis-fan to Elvis-embodier.

The biggest stumbling block to accepting that we were seeing the 'real' Elvis, is that we all knew him (with the exception of some conspiracy theory- loving fans) to be dead. In literal terms, we were not seeing his reanimated body on stage. But in other ways, the Elvis impersonators were zombie-like in their re-presentations. They appear as a Derridean undecideable (2004): against a final signified and binaries of either/or, they appear as both fan and idol, present and absent; alive and dead. The tribute artists function as a 'supplement' and palimpsest; something that both extends and replaces, transforms but leaves traces of the previous incarnation. Derrida uses the Egyptian myth of Thoth and King Ammon, father and son, to explain the term supplement: that is, Thoth will extend the lineage of Ammon, and also ends Ammon's reign by replacing him as King. This is another undecideable; it suggests 'the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough the same and enough

other so that it can replace by addition' (Derrida, 2004, p. 168). Thoth the prince-king and supplement acts as a sort of '*joker*', as do tribute artists in which the performer stands in for both a figure of the past and for herself; s/he 'cannot be assigned a fixed spot in the play of differences' (Derrida, 2004, p. 93).

There was a confusing hall-of-mirrors quality to the performances of the impersonators, which moved back and forth between sincere imitation, parody and moments which revealed their own positions as fans of the originary. Asides to the audience where the impersonators discussed their favourite Elvis songs, the moments they fell in love with Elvis' music, etc., momentarily removed the façade of re-presenting Elvis and positioned the performers alongside the audience as fans. These moments acted as what Richard Schechner calls 'metacommunication': Schechner draws on social scientist Gregory Bateman's theory of metacommunication as a signal that frames other signals contained within or after it. The example is a dog playfighting with its owner; the 'nip' of the dog within this frame means play and love rather than harm (2006, p.103). This 'metacommunication' allowed the audience to 'see double', revealing the performance of multiple personae, and signalling the audience's multiple levels of awareness.

Returning to Ferris' uses of Goffman, the 'frame sophistication' in celebrity impersonation requires a level of cooperative management from performer and audience of the multiple contextual layers and performances of self/other, both understanding this and 'holding it to one side'. For Ferris, this marks out the performance mode of tribute as a liminal space (2010, p. 74) in which external realities are suppressed while alternative actualities are created. Ferris draws on Victor Turner's work, positing that liminal spaces are contexts which temporarily dissolve one's sense of identity and everyday social structures, often within a ritual context

(2010, p. 74). Here I diverge from Ferris' use of Turner; tribute performances seem to be more liminoid than liminal, that is an optional ritual rather than required rite-of-passage, a temporary break from society, with play and leisure at its heart (Turner, 1974, p. 65). My initial engagement with the Elvies, as a non-Elvis fan, had a light-hearted curiosity, and it didn't occur to me as a site of ritual. However, there were (temporary) transformations within the performance frame of tribute; audience members as simultaneous non-fans and fans, and performers as both amateur entertainers and iconic rock god(s). Building on Turner's broader definition of the limen, performance academic Susan Broadhurst (1999, pp. 11-13) states that liminal performances are characterized by hybridisation, indeterminacy, a lack of aura and the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and popular culture. The Elvies performances demonstrated all these characteristics and more.

Broadhurst's invocation of 'aura' connotes the mythic status and performance-presence of a cultural icon such as Elvis. It also reminds us of Walter Benjamin's use of the term and its relation to authenticity and presence. For Benjamin, aura is a work of arts' 'presence in time and space, its *unique existence* at the place where it happens to be' (1969, p. 3, my italics). Discussing an actor performing on film for the first time, Benjamin states that the actor is now also concerned with performing himself, rather than solely the character. For Benjamin, in reproduction, the aura disappears: 'for aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it' (1982, p.230). As Philip Auslander argues, what musicians really perform on stage is not just music, but first and foremost 'their own identities as musicians, their musical personae' (2006, p. 102). These personae are expected to be similar from performance to performance, but are also newly produced at each performance by a working consensus with the audience.

Lorena Turner's classifications of lookalikes, impersonators and tribute artists creates a hierarchy of representation. This implies that the more 'accurate' the mimicry of the celebrity, the more successful the performance. But for me as a punter at the Elvies, my assessment of 'value' of the performers moved away from scoring points for perfect simulation. The joy of the Elvies, and the representer culture performed within and around the awards, was, returning to Broadhurst, found in the collapse of assessments of high or popular culture, and with it notions of performance rigour and polish. Binaries of amateur and virtuoso were dismantled; as one Elvis tribute artist stated when asked if he was an impersonator, 'you can't impersonate "genius"' (Foley, 2013) – freeing the Elvis representers to find their own performance niche within the culture of 'the King'.

Performing Tribute: Celebrity Representation as Fan Labour

Representers, particularly tribute acts, perform fanac, or fannish activity. Fanac, or fan labour includes fan fiction, fan art, music and costuming based on pre-existing fictional and real-world people. Fanac is an important outlet for fans to express their creativity and dedication to the canon of a fictitious, celebrated, or mythic world (Duffett, 2013, Hellekson, 2009, Hills, 2002, Stanfill and Condis, 2014, Stein, 2013). Fanac also serves as a context for those who create original cultural output, such as writers and actors, to engage with their fans. Many fanac creators term their outputs 'transformative' (AO³, 2015, online); this wording being key to legal battles regarding intellectual property rights, and the term offered as an alternative to 'derivative'.

The Organisation for Transformative Works (online, 2017), a nonprofit fan activist organisation, defines transformative as:

A transformative work takes something extant and turns it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression. Transformative works include but are not limited to fanfiction, real person fiction, fan vids, and fan art.

The term transformative can apply, to take the example of fanfic, to something written from the viewpoint of a character that isn't the canon's protagonist. Fanfic can also be more overtly critically engaged, for example a fanfic which illustrates something about current attitudes towards celebrity, sexuality, race, or gender.

The (fan) performances I saw, despite replicating Elvis' songs and stagecraft, were far from 'derivative'. The performance passion and unique and sometimes strange re-presentations were indeed 'transformative': Elvis' music, performances, and costuming were all reworked by the performers to incorporate their subjectivities, whether focused on their positions as Elvis-fans, as musicians, or within the frame of their identity politics. Similar to fanfic forums, the Elvies were, despite the framework of a competition, refreshingly free from hierarchical value judgements of taste, aesthetics and professionalism. These are criteria which can be crushingly prevalent in traditional cultural sectors. In fanac, some of the key criteria used to judge 'value' is passion, imagination, and dedication (Dilling-Hansen, 2015, Polasek, 2017, Stein, 2014). The Elvies gave a platform to anyone who wanted to perform and present themselves as Elvis; the earlier performances we encountered prior to the competition stages demonstrated that there was little to no 'quality control' in place. This didn't affect our enjoyment of those presentations, however, and indeed many fanac producers relish the title of 'amateur', believing that contributing to their respective fandom strengthens the fan community.

As media scholar Henry Jenkins states:

Embracing an understanding of intellectual property as 'shareware,' something that accrues value as it moves across different contexts, gets retold in various ways, attracts multiple audiences, and opens itself up to a proliferation of alternative meanings (2008, p. 256).

By highlighting and reiterating a cultural property, fans are strengthening the cultural legacy and importance of the originary. Just as an art critic creates a response to an artwork, authors of fanac both extend and replace the meaning of the cultural property itself. However, the embracing of ‘amateur’ qualities by representers, further subverts the representation of the celebrity. This position is actually (possibly unintentionally) quite transgressive: Elvis, Michael Jackson, and Madonna are totems of the commodity of late-capitalist society, where the acts of individuals can be equated with acts of consumption. Placing fans as the active producers of these cultural icons challenges the stranglehold of mythic celebrity-creation by the media and entertainment industry.

Fan communities, exemplified by the Elvies, have an active engagement with the cultural property they coalesce. Jenkins discusses the transformation of fanac in the advent of digital technologies such as web 2.0, which provides platforms for fans to become ‘active readers’; actively participating in the production of content using inspiration from the fandoms they inhabit (Jenkins, 2013). He develops Michel de Certeau’s term ‘textual poaching’ to describe fans’ ‘impertinent raid on the literary preserve where fans take away only those things that are useful or pleasurable’ (Jenkins, 2013, p. 9). However, Jenkins’ theory of active readership does not encapsulate the depth of transformation that both fans and tribute artists experienced at the Elvies. This transformation through performance differs from the fannish definition.

Performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte describes ‘transformation’ as a process which involves the performers and audience becoming co-subjects in the performance: a metacommunicative reversal of roles, in which ‘all participants experience a metamorphosis’

(2008, p. 23). Fischer-Lichte's notion of the performative turn¹⁴, prevalent in contemporary art since the 1960s, has changed the nature of the relationship between subject and object, observer and observed, and artist and audience, collapsing these binaries to create a dynamic and transformative event. This troubling of performer and audience returns us to Ferris' use of Goffman and Turner within the field of celebrity impersonation; the Elvies deconstructed traditional divisions of performance-maker and audience to co-create a meaningful space for the Elvis representer.

Fischer-Lichte's refutation of the oppositional nature of 'presence' and 'representation' is also integral to the performances of the Elvies. As I understood the ETAs as non-celebrities vying for the title of best Elvis tribute artist, I also accepted them 'as' Elvis: that is, a 'perceptual multistability' (2008, p.148), an understanding that the performer stands in for a character, and is also a bodily being in the world. This duality of understanding within the Elvies created moments of 'destabilization', a state of being caught 'betwixt and between' perceptions (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 148), being on the threshold of understanding the performer in multiple ways to create a transitional, liminal state.

Although Jenkins' model of fans-as-poachers is dominant in the field of fan studies, this approach does not allow us to consider the context and reception of the reworked and transformed cultural properties. Specifically applying a performance studies paradigm to fandom reveals the generation of meaning through fan play and participation outside of the primary media text (Booth and Bennett, 2015, online). Kurt Lancaster's *Interacting with "Babylon 5"* is one of the first investigations to do this. Lancaster contrasts fan performances

¹⁴ Fischer-Lichte uses the 'performative turn' to describe how, since the 1960s, fixed boundaries between genres of art were becoming more fluid. More artists were creating events instead of static works of art, with art often realised as performance (2008, p. 18).

(whether reading or writing fanfic, or performing as tribute or watching as tribute-fan) with the experience of engaging with ‘traditional’ entertainment such as television or novels. The latter fans participate vicariously through another’s performance, whereas fan-produced works require a different kind of participatory technique, one in which the audience has to actively engage the site as performers (Lancaster, 2001, pp. 32-33).

More often than not, within fan communities, representers are the super-fans. On the second day of the ‘Probing Elvis’ workshop, we met with Foley, that year’s Elvies winner of the ‘Best ’68 Special’ award. Foley turned up in his off-duty clothes, rather than one of his Elvis costumes, but this was still something I could imagine Elvis wearing in his downtime in the early sixties. It seemed that Elvis had become ingrained in Foley’s persona. Before leading a workshop where we were taught some of Elvis’ signature moves, and then collaborating on a group performance of ‘Return To Sender’, Foley told us of his journey to becoming one of Europe’s most successful Elvis performers. An Elvis fan from a young age, he started off in musical theatre before performing as Elvis full-time. The workshop group had been really impressed with Foley’s performance the night before; as he stated, because there are so many Elvis Tribute Artists, they each have to have their own unique selling point if they are to make their performances their profession. Foley’s was to work with accomplished musicians as a ‘big band’ backing him, and he himself was a talented piano player. Technical virtuosic flair was his selling point, but the attempt at more precise musical mimicry meant that there was less freedom in his act to improvise and engage with the crowd.

Documentation of Foley’s performance at the 2018 Elvies can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5jTMFbTZSU&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5r-wqqq5-vFSp&index=4&t=1s> (Hibbert, 2018, online)

What his workshop taught us is what Ellen Kirkpatrick terms ‘embodied translation’ (2015, online). Kirkpatrick discusses this as a method of cosplay (a contraction of costume play), where fans wear costume and occasionally act as fictional characters. What cosplayers and ETAs do is create a dialogue with the source character through costuming and rehearsals, learning how to read the originary’s body language, and how to speak and perform it. The transference of this newly acquired language onto our own ‘unique material visibility’ (Kirkpatrick, 2015, online) is an instance of embodied translation. In translating established characters, cosplayers and indeed tribute artists are involved in a constant process of recreation, simultaneously producing a new character, and a revised version of the originary.

Vaseline and Rose Oil: ‘becoming’ Elvis

In 2013, I took inspiration from the world of cosplay for my creative intervention *Vaseline and Rose Oil* at Experimentica festival in Cardiff. While the other ‘Probing Elvis’ workshop participants all contributed to a cabaret of Elvis-inspired performances, I created a participatory practice experiment in which the festival-goers could get in on the Elvis act. Named for the products that Elvis used to create his iconic quiff, *Vaseline and Rose Oil* was a temporary barbers located in Chapter Arts Centre’s cafe that only offered hairstyles which would signify the King. While cosplayers perform embodied translation, the transformations of the visitors to my barbers was more superficial, as only an aesthetic transformation occurred – they weren’t required to perform hip gyrations, sing, or enact a lip curl.



VASELINE AND ROSE OIL BARBERS

Men's reg. haircut	Currently unavailable
Snr. reg. haircut	Currently unavailable
Boys's reg. haircut	Currently unavailable
Buzz cut	Currently unavailable
Flat top	Currently unavailable
Beard and moustache trim	Currently unavailable
Shave	Currently unavailable
Pompadour	£Free
Quiff	£Free
Kiss curl	£Free
Sideburns	£Free



All documentation credits to Nicki Hobday

Nonetheless, this visual change signified to the other festival goers that their position from viewer had shifted to that of ‘performer’. The twelve or so Elvis-ified participants wandering around the festival became a kind of ‘eye spy’ feature for other punters: a ‘spot the Elvis’ game. The space and time of the hair styling (which was not that speedy given my poor abilities to coiffure) provided a context to chat with the participants about Elvis, whether they were fans, and why they were participating – was it an homage? For some, it was a tribute; for others, a bit of silliness; for many, just curiosity to engage with the work.

The 2017 *Cut Festival: The Art of Barbering*, curated by the artist Jamie Lewis Hadley, was a multidisciplinary arts festival in East London that explored the history, politics, and craft of barbering and its relationship to themes of race, gender, ritual, community and social healing (Hadley, online). The artists and audience involved stated that for many, hairstyling is an integral part of their identity and how others perceive them: a way of keeping who you are intact’ (Hadley, online). To intervene in this identity self-construction, and to ‘map’ another’s aesthetic identity, involves a level of trust, and indeed intimacy. Spending a lot of time touching a stranger's head was, for me, an unusual experience. But far from the cliché of discussing holidays, this tactile intimacy actually became a sort of shortcut for the people I was styling to open up and discuss Elvis, as well as topics such as the work, the festival, how the participants saw themselves and chose to present themselves to the world.

An element of power play also existed. Although I was the ‘transformer’, I made the decision that even if encouraged by the people in my ‘barber’s chair’, I would not be cutting any hair. The transformations were mask-like in that they were temporary, a persona participants could ‘try on’. As artist Oreet Ashery states, reflecting on her use of hair as a medium in character

building, hair can make gender and identities appear and disappear (in Hadley, online). In 2011 in Liverpool, she made *As-Salam wal Hub*, a project which saw her transform (via hairdressing) several volunteers into Ringo Starr, a Liverpool-born celebrity who was both loved and hated by Liverpudlians. Hair was cut into Starr's widow's peak, and the cut hair was reapplied on the face to create his beard and moustache. It was important to me that the participants of *Vaseline and Rose Oil* had input into their Elvis-styling, choosing how their Elvis-ness was to be manifested, and understanding that it would only last for the day.

Some of the *Vaseline and Rose Oil* participants commented on the archival images I had pinned to the wall behind my 'salon' set up: images from *Life* magazine in 1957 which showed teenage women getting their hair cut short in Elvis-fashion. The accompanying article, 'Ain't Nothin' But A Hairdo', explained that in Grand Rapids, Michigan, over 1000 young women had cut their hair to style themselves after their musical hero. Some brought their chopped off long ponytails back to their parents and boyfriends, much to their disgust. Elvis performed a very particular type of sexualized masculinity – CBS, the American TV network, filmed his performances only from the waist up to hide his hip thrusting performances. His overt sexuality was censored and hidden from his contemporary audience. These women, and the festival goers in Cardiff I styled, used the hairstyle as a way in to performing Elvis, a 'trying on' of masculinity(s). It wasn't about re-enacting an 'authentic' portrayal, but about using an aesthetic signifier as a way of embodying a less overt Elvis performance: a bit of swagger, charisma, and confidence.



No photographer credit given, Life Magazine, 1957

Tribute Artists as Fan Labour

Within the Elvies, Foley's performances, workshop content and marketing rhetoric all strive to create the 'authentic' Elvis experience. His website details how 'his costumes are exact recreations of Elvis' stage wear and are all made by a renowned US costume maker, who holds the original patterns of Elvis' jumpsuits'; that he is 'one of the closest tribute artists you will ever see'; and lists testimonials exclaiming 'Close your eyes and it really could be the King performing, just a few feet away from you!' (Foley, 2017, online). The accuracy of the impersonation, consolidated by Foley's use of exact replicas of costumes, act as authenticators which sell his act to potential audiences. Celebrity impersonators offer audiences the prospect that the 'real' is valuable but flexible: we desire an encounter with Elvis, but accept that we can't access him, so the impersonator steps into that absence (Ferris, 2010, p.77).

Despite professional tribute artists' reliance on 'authentic' representations, representers' performances escape a purely 'derivative' repetition. To return to the Organisation of Transformative Work's definitions of derivative and transformative fan works, we see that the key characteristic of transformative fan labour is 'altering the [source] with new expression, meaning, or message' (Fanlore, 2016, online). A derivative fanwork repeats the source with no new creative shifts. Fanworks including tribute have been critiqued as derivative, as being imitative and unimaginative, mere simulations of the originary. Tribute in fact has been positioned as 'the most maligned sector' of popular music (Klosterman, 2004, p.58). The definitional differences of derivative and transformative iterative fanworks brings to mind Baudrillard and Deleuze's different understanding of simulacra. When tribute is read as purely derivative, we can see it as an example of Baudrillard's 'second order simulacra': a proliferation of mass-reproducible copies that turns the reproduced item into a commodity (1983, pp. 96-102). The reproduced item's ability to imitate or replicate reality threatens to

replace the 'original'; the reproduction is not a counterfeit but refers instead to other counterfeits in the series of reproductions. Baudrillard's theory of simulacra can be read as a lament for the 'real' that has been lost in the virtual world of simulation (Massumi, 1987)

Tribute's transformative properties allow it to break free of Baudrillard's 'circular, Moebian compulsion' of repetition (1994, p.35). Instead, these creative reiterations of past performances affirm their own differences. Like Deleuze's example of Pop Art, the simulacra of impersonation breaks out of the copy mold, with its own agency and a life of its own. As Brian Massumi states:

The thrust of the process is not to become an equivalent of the "model" but to turn against it and its world in order to open a new space for the simulacrum's own mad proliferation (1987, p. 91).

ETAs need to be enough equivalent to the 'model' that it is recognisable as the originary, but enough 'other' than it, in order to be of 'value'. Having a unique selling point within the saturated market of ETAs, a unique performance niche within the genre, contrasts with the ideal of the accuracy of mimesis of Elvis. While seemingly opposite performance values, both are required to be of marketable value to the Elvis fans who follow the ETA circuit. While I position ETAs as an example of Deleuzian simulation, that is, a creative process that is not subsumed but the originary, there is also something of relevance within Baudrillard's definition with its emphasis on the commercialisation of tribute. For Foley and for many other ETAs, tribute is their livelihood. There are a number of different commodifications of fanac at play, both economic and cultural, which points to what media scholar John Fiske (1992, p. 30) calls the 'shadow cultural economy' of fandom. Fanac has its own systems of production and distribution of cultural production which circulates among, and helps to define, the fan community. Fiske draws on Bourdieu's metaphor of culture as an economy in which people invest and accrue capital, and in which judgements of taste and value are made. He argues that

fandom works both outside and sometimes against dominant cultural capital, yet also reiterates and reworks certain characteristics of the 'official' culture to which it is opposed (1992, p. 34). 'Official culture' sees its texts or cultural properties as the creations of special individuals, artists or geniuses: Elvis, for example. This reverence places the creator's audience in a subordinate relationship to the fan-subject.

Popular culture, and fandom itself, recognizes the multiplicity of production of 'industrially produced' cultural properties; opening them up to a productive reworking and overwriting that a 'completed art-object' is not (as readily) subject to. Fiske argues that dominant culture denigrates and misunderstands the production and reception of popular culture (including fanworks), failing to recognize that many 'industrially produced' texts have 'producerly' characteristics that stimulate popular productivity because of their contradictions, 'inadequacies', and superficialities (1992, p. 47). These qualities make the texts open and provocative, inviting transformation through fan labour such as tribute performances and fanfiction. ETAs and their audience are transformed from passive consumers to active co-producers through their reinscription of Elvis. They are not subordinate to the myth of the icon but are producing a contemporary rewriting of him.

Fans' productivity is categorized by Fiske into three distinct areas, with the caveat that fanac may span all three. All productivity occurs at the interface of the cultural property and the everyday life of the fan. Semiotic productivity encapsulates a productive behavior relating to all popular culture rather than just fandom, including meaning-making of social identities and experiences from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity (Fiske, 1992, p. 37). Fiske gives the example of Madonna fans who performed their sexuality differently after engaging with her music video and stage performances (1992, p. 37). This productivity is usually a

personal meaning-making whereas, in enunciative productivity, meaning-making is shared through oral culture or online forums, often fan-to-fan (1992, p.38). Soap opera fans discussing potential future storylines is an example (1992, p. 38). Enunciative productivity is not solely verbal; the fans not performing on stage but also dressed as Elvis in Porthcawl produced their fan identities and consolidated a fan commodity through this construction of social identity. Lastly, textual productivity is when fans produce their own cultural products based on their fandom, with production values ranging from a DIY aesthetic to a similar production value to that of the originary (1992, p.39).

ETA performance is fan labour that exemplifies all three of Fiske's categories of productivity. Foley's performance at The Elvies, for example, demonstrates textual productivity by his reworkings of Elvis songs in a 'big band' style, and his insertion of his opinions-as-fan in his onstage patter, moving in and out of Elvis and fan personae. His participation in ETA culture - judging other categories, offering advice to emerging ETAs, and even leading the workshop I attended - is enunciatively productive. What was most interesting to me was the evidence of personal semiotic productivity that his chosen career brought to bear on his lived experience, even when not outwardly performing as Elvis. In our Q and A session, Foley spoke of the inner-confidence and conviction in his creativity that he had gained by studying and embodying Elvis' performances.

As part of the Q and A session within the workshop with Foley, he said that his ambition for his tribute as and to Elvis was to give something back to the contemporary Elvis fan community which is now unable to access the real King's performances, as if he were a stand in for the originary. This quality of mimicry is reminiscent of the colloquial terms 'realness' and 'passing' used in 1980s and '90s New York drag ball culture. Within performance studies,

artist-researcher Owen G. Parry develops the concept of a colloquial performance practice with the use of three examples in his article ‘Fictional Realness: Towards a colloquial performance practice’ (2015). Parry examines vernacular drag performance in Jennie Livingston's seminal documentary film on New York City ball culture *Paris is Burning* (1999), the “documentary fictions” of South African rap-rave group Die Antwoord, and the theoretical concept of a minor literature developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1975). Although not specifically examining the performances of representers, for me there are conceptual crossovers in Parry’s interrogation of the term ‘realness’ in relation to these artworks. ‘Realness’, here meaning to pass as a specific class or gender other than one’s own, functions as a repetitious device that *detrterritorialises* (Deleuze and Guattari) the major language (‘the real’) and subverts it from within, calling forth a new language (‘realness’), and a new scene (the ballroom) (Parry, 2015, pp. 110-111). ‘Realness’ points to the fictions already at play in the so called ‘real’, freeing its performances from being subservient to, and free from the hegemonies of, the dominant ‘real’ (i.e. the world outside the ball competitions). Parry offers the term ‘fictional realness’ as a performance method produced through modes of ‘affective inhabitation’ (2015, p. 115) rather than uncritical imitation, as a framework to *read* ‘exaggerated experience’, cultural properties that present a hybrid of actual, virtual and fictional realities.

As Judith Butler states in *Bodies That Matter* (1993a, p. 129) ‘what determines the effects of realness is the ability to compel belief’. For Butler, gender and identity is inherently performative and repetitive, in fact ‘gender is an impersonation[...]becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits’ (Butler in Kotz, 1992, p. 85). Performing gender in and of itself can be read as an act of ‘passing’. As discussed, the ‘acceptance’ or ‘passing’ of ETAs *as* Elvis is a co-created state by performer and audience, an acceptance which is simultaneously acknowledged as ephemeral within the frame of the Elvies,

and a temporary, simultaneous knowing and *unknowing* of the ETAs' other performed selves. Parry's term 'fictional realness' is at work in the Elvies; by productively reenacting the myth of Elvis, the very 'realness' of the myth is both deconstructed and reconstructed by fans and fan-performers. Elvis's 'genius' and status is brought into being by the breadth of fan labour. As Foley's (2017, online) mission on his website states: 'keeping the legacy of "Elvis" alive'. Note the quotation marks here; Foley even seems to be calling into question a fixed identity or original 'realness' of Elvis. Performing 'Elvisness' is an expansive rather than reductive reiteration, repeating the 'hidden forces of difference that produce texts, rather than repeating the known texts themselves' (Colebrook in Parry, 2015, p. 110). 'Realness' and 'tribute' are understood not through imitation but through affect: a layering of performed selves, a process of becoming.

Conclusion

Through my analysis as audience-member at the Elvies, and as artist-researcher at *Experimentica*, I position tribute as embodied fan labour. The performance mode of tribute, like other fanac, both disseminates and constructs the mythos of celebrity. As an audience member, I was temporarily co-opted into the Elvis fandom, through tribute's process of transformation. The performances were transformative in both the fannish and performance studies understandings: taking an existing 'text' and giving it new expression, and with both performers and audience going through a significant (though temporary) change.

Tribute isn't an uncritical repetition, instead tribute underscores identity as performative. A play of 'fictional realness' is enacted; Elvis' performance legend is constructed and deconstructed by both the ETAs and audiences as Elvis fans. Tribute also dismantles binaries of 'amateur' and 'virtuoso'; value judgements from both audiences and judges at the Elvies

aren't focused on mimesis of the originary, but on the performing, embodying, and enacting of fandom itself. Through the interpretive frame of the Elvies, the audience understood the ETA performers as simultaneously 'the' Elvis and Elvis fan, and they act as co-conspirators in this performance 'resurrection' of 'The King'. The ETAs at the Elvies, and the many live artists engaging with Elvis representation at *Experimentica*, demonstrate not only Elvis' position as an open and producerly text which invites creative engagement, but his continued significance within wider popular culture. Drawing on media studies theories, particularly the work of John Fiske, I position tribute as an example of producerly *practice*: while Elvis may be the originary producerly *text* for Foley and the other ETAs, it is their tribute performances which are open to multiple interpretations and uses by their fan communities. In the following chapters, I consider producerly practices further, asking how they use repetition to perform cultural memory and as personal creative outlet. Rethinking 'producerly' as practices rather than solely as texts necessitates a 'doing' on the part of the researcher, so I shall continue to apply a practice-research methodology within this interrogation.

CHAPTER TWO

MAN IN THE MIRROR: RE(-)PRESENTING MICHAEL JACKSON

Michael Jackson, who was at one time Elvis' son-in-law, reveals further complications when examining acts of tribute and representation. As histories of Jackson and of Jackson tribute artists are narrative case studies for this thesis, in this chapter I analyse representations of Jackson, Jackson tribute artists, and Jackson fans. I do this by reviewing existing research and film, contemporary art, and performance practices which investigate representations of Jackson and their relationships with repetition, doubling, and tribute. Jackson's body and performances trouble normative identity categories of gender, race, age, and sexuality; this chapter considers how Jackson representers evidence and celebrate (or otherwise) this idea. I analyse Harmony Korine's 2007 film *Mister Lonely*; sociologist-photographer Lorena Turner's bookwork *The Michael Jacksons* (2014); the unaired Sky Arts *Urban Myths* television show featuring Joseph Fiennes as Jackson; photographer Owen Logan and writer Uzor Maxim Uzoa's photo-essay *Masquerade: Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria (2001-2005)*; and the posthumous 'hologram' performance 'by' Jackson at the 2014 Billboard Music Awards to do so: deconstructing Jackson's performances of identity(s), and the contemporary theoretical discourses around this.

I use Judith Butler's understanding of identity as the starting point for this enquiry into Jackson and identity. For Butler, identities are sites of construction that come into being through repetition (Butler, 1993b, p. 311). It is also important to note that identity categories tend to be 'instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression' (Butler, 1993b, p.308). I ask how Jackson tribute artists navigate representations of Jackson and of their identities.

I investigate how contemporary artists add to and disseminate Jackson's 'star text', focusing on the touring contemporary art exhibition *Michael Jackson: On The Wall* (2018-2019) to do so. I use Richard Dyer's (1979) definition of a star text, which posits that the narratives of a celebrity are constructed from a range of media texts, including artistic output, promotional materials, media discourse about the star, etc, to understand myth-constructions of Jackson. I consider Jackson using the term 'problematic fave': 'a person or thing that has exhibited "problematic" (racist, sexist, etc.) behavior but for whom the speaker's affection has not diminished' (Fanlore, 2019b, online). While this fannish term does not signify the seriousness of the issues surrounding Jackson, I also begin to consider how fans (and creative practitioners working with Jackson's star text) contend with the allegations against Jackson of committing child sexual abuse. Finally, I explore how a star text may change when significant new cultural texts about a celebrity are released: I examine the effects of the 2019 documentary *Leaving Neverland* on the *On The Wall* exhibition and its reception.

'No truer souls than those souls who impersonate'

Harmony Korine's 2007 film *Mister Lonely* has representers at its heart. A Michael Jackson impersonator meets a Marilyn Monroe lookalike at a performance in a Parisian care home. Marilyn invites him to move to a castle in the Scottish Highlands where she lives with her partner Charlie Chaplin, daughter Shirley Temple, and a host of other impersonators.

Mister Lonely trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lybo2JQc2zM&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=4> (Korine, 2008, online)

The film's use of long lens viewpoints, reminiscent of the paparazzi's prying eye, underscores the film's exploration of voyeurism and celebrity (Gilbey, 2008, online). Most of the critical

reception of the film was negative, but what its detractors haven't valued is the film's poignant investigation into performances of identity and a search for self. As The Queen states at the end of the group's talent show style performance:

We are but humble impersonators, regular people like you, and without you, we would be nothing. Our goal, as always in performing, is to try and entertain you and search out the beauty that is life, the splendor and poetry of it all... And remember, there's no truer souls than those souls who impersonate. For we live through others in order to keep the spirit of wonder alive. Thank you, thank you.

The Queen character here not only underlines the audience's integral part in creating the impersonation frame, but also hints at one of the fascinations that representers hold for us. That is, they demonstrate that all identity performance involves re-presentation, reiteration and mimicry. The 'truth' performed by impersonators is that they make manifest this process.

As representers create their performance by a constant overwriting replay of their originary, so we create ourselves by a writing and re-writing of identity performance. This is, as Deleuze and Guattari term it, a becoming:

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification [...] Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.262)

It isn't the imitation that creates our selves, but the process of that imitation. It is, as Judith Butler writes, a 'psychically entrenched play', a 'role' that comes into being only by being repeated again and again: 'the "I" is a site of repetition' but the ' "I" is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it' (Butler, 1993b, p. 311). Here Butler is referring to gender, but this repetitive enaction can be expanded to (m)any aspects of how our bodies are read: including class, race, nationality (while not disregarding the power structures that intersect with

these identity categories). Becoming ourselves involves performing ‘copies of copies without an original’ (Butler, 2004, p. 120): identity performance as impersonation in and of itself.

Michael Jackson represents both complicate and underscore this further. These performers represent a ‘sorting-out, trying-on and full-bodied acceptance of a profusion of racial and gender identities’ (Turner, 2014, p. 18). According to Turner, during his life, Michael Jackson became ‘the ultimate Method actor’, owning and fully inhabiting each identity and costume that he brought into being (Turner, 2014 p. 97). His extreme aesthetic transformation, whether due to cosmetic or medical surgeries, marked him out as extremely individual in terms of his fame, appearance and identity performance. Many are both fascinated and shocked by him; his hybrid racial and gender identity is liberating to some, troubling to others. Sociologist Michael Eric Dyson states that Jackson’s career and performances contested the disempowerment that can result from political, economic, social and cultural marginality. We are drawn to consider him as ‘he so easily and eerily represents us, even mirrors us (all of us) at the same time [...] He is a Promethean all person who traverses traditional boundaries that separate, categorize, and define difference: innocent/shrewd, young/old, black/white, male/female, and religious/secular’ (Dyson in Turner, 2014, p. 104).

The Man In The Mirror: Jackson, doubleness and hybridity

Performance and popular music scholar, Susan Fast has positioned Jackson’s troubling of normative binaries of identity as queer,¹⁵ evidencing his queering of the musical genre of rock to intentionally destabilize race, gender and sexuality (2012, pp. 281-282). This identity inscrutability was, she argues, too challenging for the white, largely male, mainstream music

¹⁵ Fast evokes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s expanded notion of queerness: “a lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses” (1993, pp. 8–9).

press. Fast states that Jackson's power play within conventions of rock (coming to it as an 'outsider', playing with its conventions, and spectacularizing and troubling its gender and racial norms) points to a 'queer utopia': resisting assimilation into any normative political and social order. Jackson's queerness was turned from utopia to dystopia by the mass media; before it could be analysed, it was determined pathological. Film and media studies scholar Victoria Johnson's (1993, p. 58) reading of Jackson's body is one of active resistance; his body 'took flight' from the notion of a core identity and created an ever-changing, malleable identity performance.

Fast's focus on Jackson's genre play within his music is also analysed within music academic David Brackett's article, 'Black or White? Michael Jackson and the Idea of Crossover' (2012). Brackett expands the notion of crossover: Jackson's genre promiscuity and experimentation is mirrored by his identity performance play, both within his on-stage performances and in his creative choices in his music videos. The video for *Black Or White* (1991) has been both celebrated and critiqued for Jackson's portrayal of racial and national identities.

Black or White music video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTFE8cirkdQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqg5-vFSp&index=5> (Landis, 1991, online)

Jackson's vision of an idealistic harmonious world which is both beyond yet also celebrating cultural difference (as typified by the scene where different faces from around the world 'morph' into one another) is well intentioned but portrays crass stereotypes. Brackett points to defenses of the video that the stereotypes used in *Black or White* are, well, so *stereotypical* that an ironic reading is possible; but if there is one thing I read into Jackson's work, it is sincerity. Brackett argues that Jackson's utopian re-imaginings of race intersect with Jackson's own 'star text'; perhaps it was Jackson's position of money and power that allowed him the freedom to

think of race as a relational construct and overlook the socio-political realities for many contemporary black Americans.

Media culture scholar Racquel J. Gates's article 'Reclaiming the Freak: Michael Jackson and the Spectacle of Identity' further analyses Jackson's performances of race. She notes that Jackson's 'freakishness' (2010, p.4) allowed him to offer a paradigm of black masculinity atypical to mass media and its consumers. While this intentional side-stepping of normative racial categories led to Jackson's popularity for some audiences, it also led to vitriolic criticism, typified by stand-up routines by black men trying to decipher his behaviour. Katt Williams, for example, attacks Jackson's refusal to adhere to racial boundaries by commenting on Jackson's claims that he suffers from vitiligo, a skin disease that results in depigmentation. Williams reads this tactic as an 'attempt to appropriate white privilege: "You mean I can get my credit rating up to 720 by catching this shit?!"' (2010, p.4).

Performance studies scholar Tavia Nyong'o explores the iconicity of childhood and 'the Child' in Jackson's performances in 'Have You Seen His Childhood? Song, Screen, and the Queer Culture of the Child in Michael Jackson's Music' (2011). Nyong'o affirms what the thinkers above have argued in terms of Jackson's performances of gender, sexuality, age, race, and also age, citing artist Keith Haring's perspective on Jackson as a 'non-black non-white non-male non-female creature'; 'he's denied the finality of god's creation and taken it into his own hands' (Haring, quoted in Nyong'o, 2011, p. 81). Jackson was able to inscribe his desire to transcend categories of identity upon his own body and in his performances; the continued fascination around his identity(s) after his death perhaps demonstrates how live this questioning of normative identity values is.

The Michael Jacksons

Michael Jackson representers also use his body to destabilize perceptions of essentialism, as well as enact their fannish positions. Lorena Turner's photographic survey of North American Michael Jacksons crosses genders, races, and ages. For many, he is a totem of hybridity, a 'uniracial person like themselves' (Turner, 2014, p. 105). The embracing of his representation in this way demonstrates that identities are, as Foucault argues:

historical construct[s] ... a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (1978, pp.105-6)

One of Turner's case studies, Devra Gregory, with the succinct stage name of 'Dev as MJ', explained how she, as a 51-year-old cis-gendered caucasian woman, became Jackson in her performances. Returning to dragging and the concept of 'realness', Gregory, who came from a ballet tradition, turned to Michael Jackson impersonating after learning female-to-male drag from lesbian cabaret performers (Turner, 2014 p. 136). Gregory states that she was drawn to Jackson tribute as it gave her a sense of 'female empowerment and stepping out from the norm', and an expression of her respect and passion for Jackson's virtuoso dance ability (Gregory in UTTV San Diego, 2013, online).

Gregory 'presents her transformation from "Michael" to "Dev" in "Man In The Mirror". Starts at 1 min 30 sec. Michael Jackson voice over begins the piece.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIPsNYJjN5o&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqg5-vFSp&index=30&t=0s> (2012, Gregory, online)

Alison Stone, expanding on Butler, states that constructions of gender identity 'reinterpret pre-existing constructions, themselves the precipitates of still earlier layers of reinterpretation, so that all these constructions form overlapping chains' (Stone, 2007, p. 26). Representing a celebrity with a complicated performance of gender, borrowing from drag methodologies,

shows the instability of identity performances: chains of re-interpretations which propose themselves ‘as the supplement of the supplement, sign of a sign’ (Derrida, 1976, p. 281). These cyclical re-interpretations demonstrate that there is no originary, only a prior re-interpretation, refuting the notion of essential identity categorisations. In the years after Jackson’s death, unfettered by his personal history, by the constraints of his body, Michael Jackson representers perform polymorphous self-creation, defying traditional notions of gender, sexuality, age and race.

Jackson is re-presented in the work of artist Slater Bradley in *Recorded Yesterday* (2004), part of his *The Doppelganger Trilogy* (2001-2004).

A YouTube upload of *The Doppelganger Trilogy* can be viewed at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-htjMLpmy9A&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=30)

[htjMLpmy9A&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=30](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-htjMLpmy9A&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=30) (abusepotential, 2011, online)

In this work, Bradley performs - via his ‘doppelganger’ Benjamin Brock - tribute of three musicians: Ian Curtis, Kurt Cobain, and Jackson. Bradley (through Brock) creates fake archival footage which stands in place for Bradley’s fannish objects. In *Recorded Yesterday* Brock performs iconic Jackson dance moves to camera. As art historian and writer Kate Random Love states, Bradley specifically positions Jackson as the embodiment of the fan object: ‘he was my first introduction into the realm of the rock star, and with it, the worship factor’ (Bradley in Random Love, 2019, p.94). While the precise mimicry of Jackson’s dance repertoire, and the analogue qualities of the Hi-8 film used may resonate with archival ‘authenticity’, the underscoring of the ‘doppelganger’ in the title undermines this historical ‘authority’: Bradley exposes the performance to camera as being made by ‘tricksters’ and ‘masters of enchantment’ (Random Love, 2019, p.99).

The complexities of Jackson's global iconicity is examined in *Masquerade: Michael Jackson Alive in Nigeria (2001-2005)*, a bookwork by Scottish photographer Owen Logan and Nigerian writer Uzor Maxim Uzoatu. The photo-essay depicts a fictional travelogue, in which Logan and Uzoatu use Jackson (represented by a lookalike) as a narrative device through which to 'satirize Nigerian identity politics, a nation of over 250 different ethnic groups strategically stitched together by the British Empire for the benefit of imperial trade' (Logan in Pollock, 2014, online). Logan conceived of the project after watching a Jackson representer in a Nigerian club. The audience, consisting almost wholly of white expatriates, reacted as if Nigeria was still a colonised country: a 'black country made for whites' (Noorderlicht, 2005, online). *Masquerade* was inspired by Frantz Fanon's 1967 *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which the author shares his own experiences and historical analysis to deconstruct how identity, in particular Blackness, is constructed and produced, within a colonial frame of racism and dehumanisation. Logan and Uzoatu saw Jackson as 'personify[ing] the rise to power of the black elites across newly independent African nations who chose to go on serving the white master' (Logan in Jimoh, 2017, online). This was a postcolonial relationship that Fanon explored; using examples of how some colonised peoples appropriate the culture of the coloniser, particularly by upwardly mobile black people who can afford to acquire status symbols of the coloniser (for example, a British private school education). Jackson appears dancing with people on the streets, posing next to seized guns, sitting with (lookalikes of) Elizabeth Taylor and Diana Ross. In one photo, a Jackson statue is placed in front of the Ajaokuta steel plant, which was never used due to allegations of bribery and corruption. Both the singer's statue and the factory stand as 'controversial monuments to scandalous pasts' (National Galleries, 2006, online).

The *Masquerade* project is an extraordinary body of work, but I do have a slight sense of uneasiness about it, and in my response to it. The black and white reportage mid-twentieth century style of the images speaks of the colonial eye of the outsider, exoticising the Nigerian people and landscape around and in contrast to Jackson. Whereas the Jackson tribute artists discussed previously exploit the fluidity of Jackson's identity performances to transform and reinvent themselves, there is no such self-actualisation afforded to the Jackson in Logan's photographs. The Jackson lookalike is placed in the frame, his performance largely directed by a British man. He is an impersonator, and the title of the project alludes to a hoax, not a tribute. Although Uzoatu's accompanying writing adds insight into postcolonial politics in Nigeria, my knowledge of the socio-political contemporary realities of this country is very slim. So how can I engage with the creators' stated project aims of the satirising of Nigerian politics? Is my reading of the work too shallow? Or perhaps this uneasiness is linked to my own identity as a British white person and postcolonial guilt? Jackson's fluid performances of racial identities made him a touchstone figure through which to access postcolonial narratives of cultural identity performance. His producerly qualities invite reinterpretation from a number of practitioners from diverse perspectives. Both his body and work at once embody the 'popular' and an open accessibility, and a complexity which offers almost infinite readings. He is a figure well known enough to be placed into any context, his presence sharpening the focus on that particular place and time. He is a player both knowable and unknowable - celebrated yet still always strange - allowing him to be woven into any narrative to unpack that place's histories.¹⁶

¹⁶ One such narrative was Jackson's first foray into movies, in the 1978 film *The Wiz*, a reimagining of *The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz* with an all black cast. *The Wiz* can be seen as transformative fanfic: transposing Oz into a fantasy version of New York city, challenging Hollywood's exclusion of black actors from the majority of roles and storylines. Paramount's executive, Frank Yablans, had told the film's producer that the maximum a studio could spend on a black film at the time was \$500,000. 'This is not a *black film*,' the film's producer and Motown records executive Berry Gordy corrected him: 'This is a *film* with *black stars*' (Gordy in Knopper, 2015, online).

‘Mainstreaming’ Tribute

The concept of a uniracial performing body is contentious. The 2017 response to Sky Art’s casting of Joseph Fiennes as Michael Jackson in their comedy TV anthology *Urban Myths: A Brand New Collection of Comedies* demonstrates the tension between a perhaps idealistic notion of the body as infinitely mutable, and the realities of hegemonic privilege. *Urban Myths* narrates strange celebrity stories that have become urban folklore, using high profile actors to portray the celebrity originaries.

This YouTube celebrity news item shows clips from the *Urban Myths* trailer. Both the trailer and programme were cancelled due to critic and public pressure:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8iNNMP7b10&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqq5-vFSp&index=7> (Inside Edition, 2017, online)

Critics have stated that the casting of Fiennes as Jackson is whitewashing, and the casting being announced at the same time as the #oscarssowhite¹⁷ debate only intensified the issue. Jackson’s daughter Paris (Jackson, 2017, online) tweeted a response that she was ‘incredibly offended’ and that the casting choice made her ‘want to vomit’. Putting Paris Jackson at the centre of the debate, as many media outlets did, brought even more attention to perceptions and constructions of race within this narrative. Paris has had to defend her parentage as many tabloid journalists have stated that she appears white and could not be fathered by Michael.

This notion of Paris ‘passing’ as white recalls the dragging term ‘realness’. According to English Literature scholar Rachel Dillon, to pass is to convince others that you belong in some classification that they might not think you belonged in if they had a different set of information

¹⁷ The social media hashtag #OscarsSoWhite encapsulated the protest (from both those working within Hollywood and the public) against the absence of any black actors from the 2016 Oscar acting nominations. Protest from celebrities ranged from speaking out against the ‘white-out’ of the awards in interviews or social media, to boycotting the awards ceremony.

about you (Dillon, 2009, online), and it can also mean to experience an additional identity categorization. In western performance terminology to *pass* has two major uses; ““passing as white”” to avoid and/or subvert racist oppression, and ““passing as male/female”” as part of a transsexual or transgender identity (Dillon, 2009, online). When commenters in Michael Jackson fan forums and celebrity journalists make judgements that Paris could ‘pass’ as white, they take away her voice and performance for constructing her own identity construction. There is no emancipation present in this naming or categorising, only a connotation that ‘white’ is the default way a body is read in mainstream western celebrity press.

Journalist Margo Jefferson (2006, pp. 97-98) states that Michael Jackson changed the notion of ‘passing’; the traditional understanding was to create a perfect imitation (‘is that how a white person really talks? Is that how a man really walks?’). If anything about the passer raised doubts, the performance has ‘failed’. But Michael Jackson:

imitates no kind of life known to us. He passes in plain sight. *Each appearance through the years has been a rehearsal, a restaging*. Our doubts are never soothed, our questions never answered. Passers are supposed to hide their past, shed their racial or sexual history. Michael’s past is everywhere. It exists in thousands of photographs and film images. He makes no attempt to hide it. (Jefferson, 2006, pp. 97-98, my emphasis)

Paris used her first in-depth interview with *Rolling Stone* to announce that in her lived experience, she is black. She stated that this was also how her father saw her: 'You're black. Be proud of your roots' (Jackson in Hiatt, 2017, online). Paris also tweeted a link to an excerpt from an Oprah Winfrey interview with Michael. In response to rumours that Jackson wanted a white child to portray him as a child in an advert for Pepsi, he told Oprah: “That's the most ridiculous, horrifying story I've ever heard...Why would I want a white child to play me – I'm a black American. I'm *proud* to be a black American. I am proud of my race and I am proud of who I am” (Jackson in Winfrey, 1993, online).

While the debate around whitewashing and cultural appropriation in Hollywood is critically important, the other side of that discussion often teeters close to racial essentialism, as speculation around Paris' perceived identity demonstrates. These conversations are troubling, and their prevalence in celebrity journalism demonstrates the racial ignorance and privilege inherent in those institutions. Tawdry questioning of parentage (which acts as a thin smoke screen for heteronormative interrogations into Michael's perceived sexuality and 'manliness') has become wrapped up with racist stereotyping and essentialist ideals in an unnerving way.

One of the reasons why Fiennes' casting as Jackson was so problematic, was that it came from a hegemonic capitalist institution. Arguably the casting decision was made to create tension, to create publicity, and to create hype for the TV series. There was no room for a critical, dissident or transgressive play of identity performance within this framework. The context of fan-created representation such as tribute acts, when performed as 'hobby' rather than as 'day job', resist commodification and as such has space for the subversion that a gender and racial fluid performance can create. The context of Sky Arts as producer did not. The cancelled *Urban Myths* episode demonstrates not only the importance of productive context but also of temporal intertextuality. Julia Kristeva's (in Moi, 1986, p. 37) definition of intertextuality is 'a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*)' (in Moi, 1986, p. 37). The text's meaning is shaped by other texts. Jackson's re-performed body is read with the knowledge of contemporary ethical and pop cultural debates around whitewashing in media. Intertextuality informs how Jackson's 'star text' is read, and as such is read differently in different ethical and cultural landscapes.

The uncanny Michael

The visual transformation required by Michael Jackson representers can be extreme, regardless of their aesthetic starting point. The necessary amount of make-up to create a visual representation of Jackson creates a mask, sometimes giving rise to an uncanny visage. The futility of reaching for an identity behind the mask, to find another coming into being through repetition, and another prior to that, *ad infinitum*, gives rise to a sense of the uncanny. Freud (2003, p. 141) refers to the ‘double’ as inherently uncanny; wax-works, dolls and automatons call into question whether they are animate or not. What Michael Jackson representers are aiming to mimic was in itself, mask-like. Margo Jefferson notes that not only is Jackson’s face difficult to quantify in terms of race and gender, but it is like a ‘ceremonial mask, gorgonlike’. In fact, she writes, it appears otherworldly; ‘there is no realism here, only mythology’ (2006, p.79). His visual uniqueness gives rise to questions about why someone would enter into ‘voluntary freakdom’ (Jefferson, 2006, p. 86) and in his music videos we see Jackson going through (often monstrous) transformations again and again. Jackson embraced genres of music and film that emphasize mutable identities, carefree cartoons and horror tales (Jefferson, 2006, p. 87): Jackson as zombie, as werewolf, as detective, as gang member. But when fantasy becomes biography and transformations become real, as with the 1990s and 2000s Jackson post-multiple surgeries, full-blown uncanniness is achieved:

his double, whoever or whatever it was, seemed to have triumphed. As Freud says: “You can also speak of a living person as uncanny, and we do so when we ascribe evil intentions to him.”[...] But who is Michael Jackson’s double? It is the brown skinned self we can no longer see except in the old photos and videos? Is he a good man or a predator? Child protector or pedophile? A damaged genius or a scheming celebrity trying to hold on to his fame at any cost? A child star afraid of aging, or a psychotic freak/pervert/sociopath? What if the “or” is an “and”? What if he is all of these things? (Jefferson, 2006, p. 18)

It is these multiplicities, and ‘unknowability’ that make Jackson so fascinating; we draw closer *and* recoil. Even after his death, there is still a call to see him perform. And thanks to

recent productions of holographic concerts of deceased stars, we can experience an even more uncanny performance: the posthumous Jackson concert.

What was touted as Michael Jackson's 'hologram' performed an unreleased song, 'Slave To The Rhythm' at the 2014 Billboard Music Awards (BBMA), five years after Jackson's death.

Documentation of the 2014 *Slave To The Rhythm* Billboard performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTFE8cirkdQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqg5-vFSp&index=5> (King, 2014, online)

However, hologram is the wrong terminology here; Jackson's CGI 'body' appeared via a magician's technique called Pepper's Ghost, which involves projecting an image on glass or plastic at a 45-degree angle to bring that image into the audience's field of view. This was often used in magical acts and circus and carnival sideshows, fittingly so as often Jackson's performances are labelled by his critics as freakshows. The image projected in this case was a computer animated Jackson circa 1991 (the period chosen by the Jackson estate). Frank Patterson, the CEO of Pulse Evolution, the digital effects company responsible for summoning the Jackson ghost, stated that the most difficult aspect of the project was attempting to get across 'what's called the "uncanny valley", which says the closer you get to making a digital human real, the creepier it gets' (in della Cava, 2014, online).¹⁸ Patterson believed that with 'the intricate details in Michael's face and gestures, we feel we got across'. For me as a viewer, this isn't the case.

¹⁸ Karl F. MacDorman and Hiroshi Ishiguro discuss this phenomenon via human-like robots: '[...]subtle flaws in appearance and movement can be more apparent and eerie in very humanlike robots. This uncanny phenomenon may be symptomatic of entities that elicit our model of human other but do not measure up to it[...]One hypothesis is that, by playing on an innate fear of death, an uncanny robot elicits culturally-supported defense responses for coping with death's inevitability' (2006, p. 297).

Although my engagement with the performance is mediated through a computer screen, the flattened, slightly vectorised image of Jackson most often appears as a video game character. To me, there isn't much chance of it being believed as the real Jackson. Jackson has become an avatar, to be activated and manipulated by the heirs of his catalogue. Yet for a few moments, as the camera pans around the stage, he does seem indistinguishable from the (living) backing dancers. His moonwalk suddenly seems like a far less impressive feat when you know there is no physical friction between 'foot' and floor; his dance moves - although now freed from the realities of physics (which the real Jackson's body so often seemed to challenge) - seem more staid, more wooden. Although few members of the audience dance during the performance, when 'Jackson' sits back down on his CGI throne, he still gets a standing ovation. I was confused by the genuine-looking enthusiasm that the performance elicited. According to another Pulse Evolution employee, those who were in the audience that 'knew Jackson best' started to cry upon seeing him reanimated (della Cava, 2014, online).

Jackson's performance has moved into the hyperreal; following Baudrillard, Nobuyoshi Terashima and John Tiffin (2001, p. 1) define this as a condition in which reality and fiction intermingle; there is no clear distinction between them. A further key tenet of their definition is the integration of physical and virtual reality. The fiction of 'Jackson' has momentarily been set aside by those most invested in him in the BBMA audience: he provokes real emotions. He is considered 'real' in a way that would not have been possible outside of a mediatized culture.

Philip Auslander, discussing mediatization of live performance argues that:

If the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been 'real' to begin with. This schema resolves (or rather, fails to resolve) into an impossible oscillation between the two poles of what once seemed a clear opposition: whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real,

the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc. (Auslander in Stark, 2017, p.134)¹⁹

Jackson's 'hologram' performances trouble the notion of 'liveness' in all its meanings. Uncanniness moves into uneasiness when we consider the ethical questions around resurrecting performers of the past. Jackson (in MJWorld, 2014, online) once stated that through music he would live forever, but could he have imagined this very literal immortalization? What of Jackson's authorship and agency?

Listening to the first posthumous Jackson album *Michael* (2010) also gives rise to a sense of the uncanny, for the tracks we hear aren't simply unreleased consolidated material, many tracks are pieced together 'musical suturings' (Poulson-Bryant, 2011, p. 250) of producers, manipulating small samples of demo tracks, and even, allegedly, recording a soundalike in Jackson's place. Many of the Jackson family and fan base deny that the voice on three of the album tracks are Jackson (Kennedy, 2010, online). This is manipulating the notion of fame as immortality; the pop icon can now be constructed from the human and the digital without input from the originary, rising from the grave to conquer the charts once more. All without the inconvenience of his complex and strange performances of race, gender and sexuality: a pop star made up of binary code performs no identity.

'This Is Not A Tribute'²⁰: Michael Jackson On The Wall

The narratives surrounding Jackson are a complex example of a star text. Film scholar Richard Dyer's influential book *Stars* (1979) states that celebrities, or stars, are at once constructions, commodities, and ideologies. The construction of a star is an intertextual one which includes

¹⁹ Alicia Stark deals more with hologram performances, authenticity and identity construction in her 2018 thesis, *Virtual pop: gender, ethnicity, and identity in virtual bands and vocaloid*.

²⁰ Bundeskunsthalle director Rein Wolfs (in allinfo, 2019, online) commenting on the *Michael Jackson: On The Wall* exhibition.

the text fabricated from, in Jackson's case, performances, records, music videos, interviews, advertising, magazines, and I would argue, fan narratives and fan creative practice, including tribute. In 2018, the National Portrait Gallery staged an exhibition titled *Michael Jackson: On The Wall*, investigating Jackson's star text through contemporary art. The exhibition was vast, with work from over fifty artists included, and several created portraits of Jackson via his fans. Particularly striking was Candice Breitz's 2005 *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*, a multi-channel video piece of sixteen Jackson fans singing each song from the *Thriller* album.

Extract from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdlH2tpPF6o&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqg5-vFSp&index=8> (Breitz, 2005)

Another relevant artwork was Rodney McMillian's 2003 video work *An Audience (excerpts from Michael Jackson's 30th Anniversary Special 2001)*. This piece was composed of clips of crowds from New York Jackson shows, depicting ecstatic reactions from the audience. McMillian states that he was interested in the

absence of Jackson himself in the piece. The fragmented sound of his performances and the audience's responses...These gaps were intriguing to me because they seemed to signify the gaps of information about Jackson (even with the myriad of public information about him). (in Cullinan, 2018, p. 35)

McMillian and Breitz's work places fans at the centre of the construction of Jackson's star text.

One of the 'gaps' of information about Jackson that McMillian may be referencing above concern the allegations against him of child sexual abuse. In August 1993, Jackson was first investigated on allegations that he molested four children. The police found no incriminating evidence at Jackson's houses. In September 1993, a family filed suit against Jackson for allegedly 'repeatedly committing sexual battery' on their son. The subsequent trial took place between 1993 and 1994, where Jackson settled out of court for more than \$20 million. In 2003,

Jackson's homes were raided by police, and Jackson was arrested on charges of child molestation. In 2005, this case was brought to trial where he was acquitted on all charges (Tsioulcas, 2019, online). Several of the works in the exhibition make subtle reference to these allegations; for example, Jordan Wolfson's 2001 video work *Neverland* is a four-minute video taken from Michael Jackson's 1993 *Live from the Neverland Ranch* (the site of many of the alleged assaults), a broadcast from which everything is erased except Jackson's eyes. In the 2018 National Portrait Gallery, the allegations were an uneasy undercurrent running throughout the exhibition. However, these were brought to the fore in the 2019 Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany staging of *On The Wall*. The exhibition opened in March 2019, the same month as the documentary *Leaving Neverland* aired on international television. This film, directed and produced by the British filmmaker Dan Reed, platforms the stories of abuse by Wade Robson and James Safechuk at the hands of Michael Jackson. The documentary reignited the discussion about Jackson's guilt or innocence, and led to social media campaigns such as #mutejackson, radio stations pulling his music from their playlists, and other Jackson-related cultural products being pulled from circulation (for example, *The Simpsons* 1991 episode featuring Jackson).

The Bonn exhibition opens with a written statement reacting to the *Leaving Neverland* testimonies: 'The accusations made by the alleged victims are shocking. We see it as our responsibility not to ignore this issue' (in Grenier, 2019, online). The curators stated that the exhibition was never intended to be celebratory, and that it was specifically 'not a tribute', but instead focused on 'the complexity of Michael Jackson, how he means very different things to many very different people' (Cullinan in Grenier, 2019). The curators acknowledged that the exhibition was now framed in a different way than the previous London and Paris iterations. To respond to the discussions, Bundeskunsthalle programmed an art educator to be in the space during opening hours, additional to invigilators, to discuss the works exhibited and the topics

that they may engage with. The events programme also spoke to the recent accusations: an event titled ‘IDOLIZATION, POWER, ABUSE’ was scheduled to examine abuse and celebrity - discussing Harvey Weinstein,²¹ Kevin Spacey,²² Michael Jackson and the abuse of power. The director of the Bundeskunsthalle, Rein Wolfs, stated that ‘today's aesthetic questions are also always framed in the context of ethical and moral questions (in Werman, 2019, online), demonstrating the intertextual nature of Jackson’s star text.

Artist Candice Breitz recognises this, stating that she is interested in the ‘global mainstream culture and the local contexts in which it is absorbed and used’ (in Cullinan, 2018, p. 36). Her video work, and many other artworks in *On The Wall*, spoke of Jackson fans as much as Jackson himself. Talking about the making of *King* in 2005, Breitz stated that this was also a ‘vulnerable’ time for Jackson fans, as they had witnessed the end of the child sexual abuse trials (in which he was acquitted) in 2004. This context meant that some of the fans she worked with were defensive of Jackson, and also identified with him as they saw him as a ‘survivor’ who had faced a series of life challenges (Breitz in Cullinan, 2018, p. 36).

The *On The Wall* exhibition is a fascinating case study of the changing receptions to cultural products in the light of rapidly developing ethical debates. While many residents of Bonn called for the exhibition to be taken down, Jackson fans were excited by and supportive of the Bundeskunsthalle’s handling of the recent allegations and their influence on the exhibition audience engagement (MJJCommunity, 2019, online). *On The Wall* took the stance that it is necessary ‘not to erase cultural history’ (Wolfs in Werman, 2019, online), however contentious

²¹ In 2017, the New York Times published an article accusing movie producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment of amongst others, actors Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd. Many more women have since levelled similar accusations, and Weinstein is currently standing trial in January 2020 (BBC, 2020, online).

²² Also in 2017, actor Kevin Spacey was accused by actor Anthony Rapp of sexual harassment when Rapp was fourteen years old. Subsequently many men have made similar allegations (BBC, 2019, online).

some of the related histories may be. The curatorial team positioned Jackson as a media and cultural phenomenon, and the changing audience reception to the exhibition demonstrates how that icon's star text is constantly evolving.

Conclusion

Michael Jackson has become, in death, totemic of complex and fluid performances of identities. Representers are able to wear the mask of Jackson, to explore this liminality through embodied play; reconsidering their own continual (re)constructions of identity performance. An even stranger transformation happens when media organisations appropriate Jackson's body and voice, to digitally resurrect him: Jackson appears as an avatar to be manipulated. Each new posthumous reviving of Jackson has a different purpose, whether for entertainment, for art, to express fannish passion, or for pure profit.

The breadth of practice and practitioners that reinterpret him demonstrates the producerly qualities of Jackson's star text. Whether disseminated in a contemporary art gallery, a music award show, or a tribute showcase, creative practitioners demonstrate their 'discursive competencies' (Fiske, 2011, p. 95) when representing Jackson, his performances, and histories; readings and representations are fluid, nuanced, complex. Jackson's text is 'beyond its own control' (Fiske, 1989, p. 104), the practitioners that use Jackson as source material draw attention to his (inter)textuality: they are 'involved with the process of representation rather than a victim of it' (Fiske, 2011, p. 95). Indeed, Jackson's narratives and performances as producerly text beget producerly practices. By producerly practices, I mean appropriative practices which transform the originary for the producers' own purposes and pleasures. Producerly practices are similarly open and malleable in their reading and reception as a producerly text is, and often will invite future interpretations.

A number of the performances and artworks which I have discussed are particularly useful illustrations of this. Gregory's tribute act 'Dev as MJ' for example, takes MJ's canon of performances, and plays with her identity performances, expresses her fannish identity, and reflects on and performs her subjective lived experiences (Gregory in UTTV, 2013, online). Her performances will be read in a number of ways, and her practice includes skill-sharing via Jackson tribute workshops (Gregory, 2017, online) - her Jackson re-presentation is passed on to many other possible re-presenters and fans. However, producerly practices may not always be so positively transformative, and may reify existing hegemonic ideals: Random Love argues that Bradley's re-staging of Jackson, Cobain and Curtis 'reproduce an historically gendered dynamic of cultural privilege, securing for themselves an archival genealogy of great male artists' (2019, p. 103). Nonetheless, I would position this as a producerly practice as it is fannishly transformative, and has undergone what Henry Jenkins would call a 'spread': an online sharing by audiences which may not have been authorised by the creator (Jenkins, 2009, online). In fact my engagement with this artwork was via a YouTube upload, where the channel owner, abusepotential, had intentionally added 'additional video degradation' (2011, online); playing with the archival material qualities of the originary.

However, a number of the works I discuss I would not label as a producerly practice. While the Billboard hologram performance and the posthumous Jackson album may make use of Jackson's body of work and histories as producerly texts to create new cultural products, they (the products) appear as commodities where the main motivation is financial profit rather than creative transformation. The authors of these works are the antithesis to the girl fan who 'does not allow her singularity, her liberty to think, her memories, to be colonized or controlled by media, but engages with the media as a generative source to her own memory-based creativity'

(De Kosnik in Random Love, 2019, p. 205). For it is these fans, and artists who embrace this fannish spirit, who most often create producerly practices.

The unfixed nature of producerly practices make them appropriate strategies when considering celebrities with contentious histories, who may be regarded as (extremely) problematic faves. Logan and Uzoatu's work on Jackson tribute in Nigeria for example, challenged me as viewer to consider my subjectivity and the socio-political contexts of the works making. There was no one clear reading of the artwork; the project was productively challenging, if not ethically irreproachable. Each producerly evocation of Jackson is not necessarily an homage, but an acknowledgement of his contribution to the twentieth century pop cultural landscape, whether positive or negative, but irrefutable. Intertextuality means that how Jackson is re-platformed, re-embodied, and read will change. In the light of abuse allegations, many would prefer his cultural legacy to be erased. But as the *On The Wall* exhibition demonstrates, creative practice which explores Jackson gives an opportunity for critical discussion, rather than simply erasing a cultural memory. Not all representations of Jackson need be a 'tribute'.

CHAPTER THREE

YES, IT REALLY DID HAPPEN: REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES, FANNISH INTERVENTIONS, AND POOR IMAGES

This chapter investigates how institutional archives and local newspapers contribute to the narration of the Jackson at Exeter events, and examines the supposed objectivity of these archives and history-tellers. How do the archives' and archival documents' spatial and material properties manifest in the work of the artist-researcher? Do any of the documents within these archives have the quality of historical objectivity or evidence? Can a fannish methodology be used within the decidedly non-grassroot, non-fannish spaces? I address these questions via two practice as research artworks. The first is the video work *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, using archival materials documenting the Jackson at Exeter event. *Yes, It Really Did Happen* has been presented twice: as a single channel projection in Gallery Two at Jerwood Visual Arts as part of my solo presentation there in 2018; and at The Northern Charter *Poor Copy* solo exhibition in 2018 as a single channel video presented on a monitor. The second practice-research artwork is the photograph and sound installation *No Such Event Took Place*, which uses archival materials documenting the 'Michael Jackson' 1999 Barnstaple gig. *No Such Event Took Place* has also been presented twice: at Aspex Gallery as part of the 2017 EMERGENCY group exhibition; and in the Northern Charter solo exhibition.



Yes, It Really Did Happen, presented in Gallery Two at Jerwood Visual Arts, solo presentation *Poor Copy* as part of the Jerwood *Staging Series* programme, September 2018. Image credit Hydar Dewachi.



No Such Event Took Place exhibition view, shown at *EMERGENCY*, Aspex Gallery, December 2017.



No Such Event Took Place exhibited at *EMERGENCY*, Aspex Gallery, December 2017.

Welcome to Devon Heritage Centre

The *Express and Echo* archives are held in the Devon Heritage Centre (DHC), Exeter. It is a physical archive located in an industrial estate in Exeter, run by the South West Heritage Trust, and requires membership to access its documents. It is hosted by several archivists and most of its records and documents have to be selected through a document request protocol overseen by the workers. The material and analogue documents must be handled with care, under supervised conditions. The Devon Heritage Centre is probably very similar to what most people first picture when they hear the word ‘archive’. A very quiet and large room, lined with books and somewhat outdated technology (large old PCs, a number of microfilm readers). A municipal rather than specialist archive, the few other users of the space on my visits were older people, most of whom were using the archive to further personal genealogical projects. The space is open to all for no charge, only basic ID is required to gain a ‘reader’s ticket’. The staff are friendly, knowledgeable, and extremely helpful. I found the atmosphere conducive to quiet and focused work, where hours could pass by very quickly.

I used the archive as a place to research Jackson’s visit to Exeter City Football Club, as it is the site where the back catalogue of Exeter’s local newspaper is held. The British Newspaper Archives offer a digitised archive of many local and national newspapers, which are quickly searchable by keywords, dates, places and other metadata. However, it only holds the *Express and Echo* editions from 1910, and 1939-1940. Therefore the only way to research the local news’ narrativization of the Jackson visit was to search the microfilm reels held by the DHC - which, other than by reel dates (with a fortnight of editions printed per reel) - were unindexed and unsearchable. I went through tens of reels, page by page, waiting for relevant information to jump out at me, to try to put together more chronological narrative clarity and further points of information about the Jackson visit. Thus far my investigations had been conducted online:

including national newspaper stories which did not provide much detail, fan forum reports which were from a personal and ‘micro’ view of the events, and YouTube. I had not yet conducted any oral history interviews with Exeter City Football fans.

I created a practice-research videowork in order to capture a mediated narrative of the Jackson in Exeter event, which also created a portrait of the Devon Heritage Centre (DHC) and the peculiarities of the microfilm material and research process. My initial (unfounded) preconceptions of the DHC, as a more traditional institutional archive with a ‘top down’ rather than community-led structure, was that compared to an inherently user-driven archive such as YouTube, it would be a conservative archive whose structures and materials feed into local and national meta-narratives of history. I had thought that the DHC, as Foucault describes happens in museums and archives, might attempt to enclose and constrain objects and documents in one ‘immobile place’, removed from the potentially destructive impositions of time and of readers, in an attempt at infinite preservation (Foucault, 1984, online). But actually the DHC invites engagement, attempts to remove barriers of conservation or curation, so that users can learn, touch, and engage with fragments of the past. I was forgetting that while archives can and do reiterate dominant power structures, all archives may reveal ‘the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo *regular modification*. It is the general system of the formation and *transformation of statements*’ (Foucault, 1970, p. 130, my italics). What I found through the making of the new videowork, was an affection for and pleasure in engaging with institutional archives and their analogue and unwieldy documents, and an appreciation for the fact that archivists that act as gatekeepers for institutional archives can and do allow playful engagements with the histories that they ‘guard’. Through these creative engagements, the statements within the archives are *modified* and fannishly *transformed*.

Local historical ‘canon’

Using back issues of the *Express and Echo* as one way to ‘fill in the blanks’ of the Jackson in Exeter narrative led me to engage with their distinct voice and editorial style. The layout and tone of many local British newspapers are similar to ‘middle market’ dailies such as *The Daily Mail*. In fact, the *Express and Echo*’s publishers at the time of the Jackson visit were Northcliffe Media, which is owned by the Daily Mail (Wikipedia, 2019b, online). The newspapers’ agenda, set by the gatekeeper of the paper (for example, the owner and editors), therefore, are skewed to a similar socio-political stance as the Mail. While the journalistic tone may be similar, the news stories are reported on the micro rather than macro level. It could be said that local newspapers are parochial, but they also remind the readership of the importance of local communities, their passions and concerns. The ‘canon’ of a local newspaper, therefore, narrates news stories from a particular and local viewpoint, with a journalistic style that doesn’t aim for deep analysis of current affairs, but a snapshot of local events which would appeal to as wide an audience of local readers as possible. ‘Canon’ has a number of meanings: including writing or other works that are worthy of study and consideration (Cambridge, 2020, online); the works created by a particular person (Cambridge, 2020, online); and within fan communities, ‘canon’ refers to sources considered authoritative of, and authentic to, the specific fandom (Fanlore, 2019a, online). It is no surprise that the *Express and Echo* dedicated as many pages as it did to the Jackson stories; a bizarre tabloid celebrity story was sure to help sales. It encompassed the ideas of the ‘glocal’: concepts of ‘glocalization’ are understood as a process that combines the concerns of localism with the forces of globalism. This framework can be applied to social, political, economic and in this example, cultural systems (Cameron and Kenderdine, 2007). The ‘glocal’ nature of the narrative was another selling point for the newspaper and this story: as one subheadline stated: ‘Our Day With The World’s Most Famous Man!’ (Jones, C., Lambourn, A. and Mills, C., 2002, p.1).

I researched and read these stories not using paper editions of the newspapers, but via microfilm. Microfilms are produced by a camera mounted above a document source; the film (either 16mm or as was the case with the newspaper archive, 35mm) is a record of the document at 0.25% of the original document, greatly reducing storage needs for the archive, as well as being a more stable material compared to newsprint with regards to degradation (Wikipedia, 2019a, online). The reels of photographic films are viewed by a microfilm reader, which magnifies the film onto a screen similar to a computer monitor. The researcher controls the spools of film by using the control panel at the base of the reader. There is no way to do a quick search function on a microfilm reader, no ‘control-F’²³; the reader must manually scan through each page to find the story or information they are looking for. An average 35mm microfilm reel is 100 foot long, and contains 800 broadsheet pages of newspapers (Wikipedia, 2019a, online), or in this case, a fortnight of copies of the *Express and Echo*.

The Jackson at Exeter City Football Club event, engaged with via this archival material, is already twice-photographed; the photographs by the *Express and Echo* journalists are printed in the newspapers, and then re-photographed by the photographic capture of the microfilm. Handling the reel, loading it, and slowly searching the pages gives a very physical sense of the documents’ analogue photographic materiality. As curator Okwui Enwezor states, the camera is an archiving machine, therefore every film is *a priori* an archival object (Enwezor, 2008, p.12). The microfilm medium makes this even more evident, its object-ness being so similar to mass-produced 35mm camera film used by so many in the 20th century to document holidays, family memories, etc. Microfilm and microfilm readers feel very outmoded already, like a prop from a 1970s’ sci-fi film. Enwezor likens the making of photographs to making a machine for

²³ A computer shortcut for searching text for a word or phrase.

time-travel, with the photograph itself being a nexus point for past and present, virtual and real, joining history, memory and identity together in an artefact (2008, p. 13). Microfilm newspaper archives layer archival process upon archival process: photographs onto media news narratives onto photographic film. In my practice-research video, made about and through this manual process of discovery, *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, a further archival layer is introduced: a digital video of the microfilm reader and microfilm research process itself.

To view *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X8esyXvVdQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe>

Reflecting on ‘poor images’: digitally documenting analogue archival material

Artist and writer Hito Steyerl’s definition of the ‘poor image’ could be describing the process of viewing microfilm on its reader:

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free... compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution...Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. (Steyerl, 2009, online)

While Steyerl is specifically discussing digital images, my practice-research videowork *Yes, It Really Did Happen* demonstrates a tension between analogue and digital image-making technologies, where both can be read as ‘poor’. Steyerl states that resolution and ‘copyability’ are two of the key qualities of the poor image (the latter also being key to producerly images/texts), both of which are at play in this work. The resolution of the microfilm is distinctive: not always sharp, often very grainy, the many layers of reproduction in the image revealing itself as visual noise. As Steyerl states in ‘In Defense of The Poor Image’, the poor image is a derivative image - in the case of the images in my video, a photograph printed on

newspaper, re-photographed and re-printed on microfilm, mediated by a microfilm reader, re-photographed by my DSLR²⁴, and presented on a monitor, laptop screen, or projected. In each of these instances of reproduction, a technical inaccuracy or simply the materiality of the image-taker or mediator, changes the image accordingly. In some instances, for example, whole pages of the newspaper are obscured by pages of A4 with 'POOR COPY' written on them. It is from this archival intervention that I derived the exhibition and thesis title of *Poor Copy*. Presumably the newsprint was too poor quality to read, but now the viewer in the archive is denied the opportunity to engage with the poor image of those pages; the decision of the archivist, ironically, definitively obscured the quality of visual information available to future researchers.

Steyerl discusses networks of poor images, again referencing primarily digital and online systems, stating that they enable and invite viewers' active participation in the modification and redistribution of content. Readers/users are situated as editors, critics, translators, and (co-)authors of poor images. The materiality and machinery of microfilm invites participation, and the physicality of the medium often makes this a tactile and haptic participation. The microfilm reader has similar qualities to that of a darkroom photographic enlarger, with focusing gauges and spools, and pleasingly clunky printing modes. The visual language of newsprint also speaks to 'zine culture (inextricably linked to fandom)²⁵, which suggests the potential of collage, of cutting and pasting, of modifying and re-making. In making *Yes It Really Did Happen*, decisions needed to be made about how to capture the act of 'reading' the microfilm which, as stated above, cannot be selected and skipped, each page must be scrolled through.

²⁴ Digital single lens reflex camera which can capture both photographs and video.

²⁵ Discussed further in Chapter Four.

Choosing which to show in the videowork, was therefore an act of translation and more literally an act of editing.

For Abigail De Kosnik, this re-reading, editing and re-using is fannish, and is what moves texts from ‘the unperformed archive into the performed canon’ (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 66). The act of accessing a document within an archive, of simply reading it, is powerful: elevating it to a more active cultural memory, rather than a ‘forgotten’ and ‘unperformed’ work (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 66). Similarly, poet and researcher Holly Pester argues for a ‘discursive archive method’ (Pester, 2017, p.127) where reader and archive material are placed in dialogue. Pester places importance on this ‘intersubjective relationship’ and encourages strategies of archival research which make use of gossip, playful strategies, use of fictions and humour, and names this methodological approach ‘archive fanfiction’ (Pester, 2017, p. 127). Pester’s archival research strategy comes from a place of feminist politics and activism, which can also be used to critique ‘universalising master narratives and archive orthodoxies’ (Pester, 2017, p.115). Both Pester and De Kosnik demonstrate that any engagement with archival materials are productive, where the reader and document co-create new narratives. De Kosnik frames this succinctly by stating: ‘Canon = texts + performance’ (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 66). By performing the archival fragments within the DHC to the camera, I am resuscitating and re-sharing the glocal histories of Jackson in Devon beyond the Jackson and Exeter City Football fan communities.

The majority of *Yes, It Really Did Happen* video uses the same angle: I positioned the camera to face the monitor straight on, with the microfilm reader’s monitor almost filling the mediating monitor or projected image’s frame. One can see hands operating the reader, but no figure, as if the viewer of the videowork is the one in control of the microfilm reader. There are long passages of the video where I made very few edits; instead we see a hand press the forward

button, while the microfilm images pass by, sometimes more quickly, sometimes more slowly, sometimes smoothly, sometimes jerkily. I wanted to give an impression of the process of researching within this archive, of the laborious but joyful process of using the microfilm reader: of not being able to use an online search field to find what you are looking for within a few seconds; of following the breadcrumb trail of a few dates; of not knowing what you will find, by manually going through the microfilm page by page. A rhythm was set in the search-scroll; slower scrolling through the front few pages, a fast slide-scroll through the classifieds and business section, and returning to a slow scroll at the sports pages. There is meant to be a tension between the boredom of the visual noise of the microfilm speed-scroll, grey stripes swirling past, and the anticipation of having found another relevant article, leading to another instalment of the strange story: a drip-feed of the Jackson in Exeter narrative.

The video's construction demonstrates my methodical, detective-like approach to researching the story using the microfilm. I did edit some of the superfluous footage out; for example, if a week's worth of newspapers had no relevant stories I would cut this, since if I didn't do this, the video would be well over an hour long. Even with this edit, the work comes in at almost 25 minutes, still of a duration which alludes to the lengthy research process (when compared to searching within a contemporary digital online archival context). I set up the edit of the videowork to show the repetitive quality of the microfilm research process. While this archival task can be positioned as fan labour, it is also a core research method of historians. For both fans and historians, this research method demonstrates the inextricable relationship between the subjective of the researcher/fan and the object/document. As discussed in Chapter One, fan labour positions fans not as passive consumers, but as producers, making interpretations of their favoured fan object to extratextual products such as wikis, fanfic, and fan art (Stanfill and Condis, 2014, online); similarly to how historians interpret historical material. *Yes, It Really*

Did Happen represents this process of reinterpretation, of calling attention to a cultural object in a new creative framework.

The only section of the videowork that departs from this chronological, systematic approach was the section that focused on the titular headline and associated article, ‘Yes, It Really Did Happen’(Jones, Lambourn, and Mills, 2002, p.1), and this section reflects modes of fannish behaviour in a different way. When filming this section, I asked the artist Natalie Raven, who was assisting me as ‘hand model’, to play with the zoom and focus before using the printing function of the microfilm reader. Her improvisation with these directions was really surprising. Solely by using the zoom, and by varying speed, the ‘gaze’ of the camera/viewer changes completely. The majority of the video, with its static viewpoint, matter-of-fact face-on angle, infers a more ‘objective’ perspective. Throughout this section (from around 19.43 to 22.25), a more fannish engagement emerges; it is tactile, personal, an attentive reading of the cultural text. The angle, while still flat on, facing the reader, is more tightly cropped, with connotations of closeness and intimacy with the narratives.

The microfilm reader focuses for much longer on close ups of images of Jackson, and on other details of the articles, and also directs the gaze towards the adverts and articles that surround the Jackson stories. These, in turn, allude to Jackson’s troubling histories, which was commented upon by Owen G Parry. Parry, an artist-researcher I commissioned to write a response (informed by a number of conversations between the two of us) to the *Poor Copy* exhibition at The Northern Charter²⁶, sums up this tension:

On the phone, returning to these events at Exeter and Barnstaple, Beth also warns me “while poststructuralist methods are useful for exposing the instability of the archive, the truth nevertheless sometimes just shows up”. In the video of the microfiche scanner,

²⁶ The Northern Charter is an artist-led space in Newcastle, in which I exhibited *Poor Copy* as a solo show in April 2018.

there is a point when the camera lingers “for too long” over an image of Jackson in the local *Echo* next to which are the words “Love is Michael’s Dream” and an advert which reads “Like to work with Children?” In contrast to the mechanical scanning of the Microfiche, and given the allegations of child abuse against Jackson, this lingering feels perverse, obsessive, awkward, and too suggestive. And yet to not loiter around such tacky evidence, (in this case the haptic relation between a photograph and an advert) would also be to conceal the ways that poor evidence, like poor stories, have real consequences. (Parry, 2018)

The ‘lingering’ of the reader brings to the fore two issues within Jackson fandom and Jackson’s histories: the allegations of child abuse, and the refusal by many Jackson fans to recognise his probable guilt. The intertextual and at times troubling narratives of Jackson is also pertinent here, in terms of the networked associations that archival documents can materialise. Uriel Orlow, an artist who often works with archival material, discusses the importance of the haptic resonances of documents: ‘browsing the catalogue [I let] myself be directed by associations, which often produce the most amazing constellations, where, for an instant, things connect in the strangest and most meaningful ways’ (Orlow, 2013, p. 80). The adverts for working with children and young people, the sub-headings about Michael’s ‘love’, could not be ignored, and brought new readings of the Exeter visit to the fore. The British media at the turn of the twenty-first century was saturated with stories of paedophilia, and there was a dark obsession with it in tabloid dailies.²⁷ The rest of the 25 minutes of *Yes, It Really Did Happen* often scrolled past many such stories. The ‘constellations’ of the archival material here were upsetting, at times monstrous. They formed the spectre in the archive that could not be ignored: the part of the Jackson narratives that I wanted to wilfully forget, but kept rearing its head. I had thought of my engagement with archives, and their documents within, as an entirely subjective relationship, but here the archive was ‘a place to lose a sense of your own direction and follow the trail of ghosts, or to follow a trail of the archive itself’ (O’Connor, 2015, p. 282).

²⁷ This was even satirised in a 2001 Brass Eye television episode. *Brass Eye*, created by comedian Chris Morris, was a comedy programme satirising British current affairs programmes. Six episodes ran in 1997, with a one off special in 2001, titled *Peadogeddon!*. The special focused on paedophilia and the moral panic in some parts of the British media, specifically tabloids.

The engagement with the spectre of child sexual abuse allegations within the videowork's narrative construction also shows the simultaneous fascination and abhorrence that archival stories can provoke. My intent was to show, through the videowork, how the many-mediated, many-repeated layers of archival material exposes and extends the archive's (sometimes conflicting) historical narratives, 'working over the paradoxes of loss, remainder and recurrence that archival acts precipitate' (Clarke, Jones, Kaye, and Linsley, 2015, p.12). *Yes, It Really Did Happen* offers a way into the Jackson in Exeter narrative, a portrait of the heritage centre, and a snapshot of the *Express and Echo* and similar local papers. Stories of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, and of child sexual abuse are prominent in the pages we scroll past. The poor images of the microfilm archive present, as Steyerl suggests, 'a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun and distraction' (2009, online). My narrativization of the *Express and Echo*'s coverage of the Jackson at Exeter is meant to embody these paradoxical qualities.

Photograph - document - evidence

Within *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, as the pages scroll by, the microfilm reader pauses to read at least the title and first paragraph of each relevant news story. But it is the articles' photographs that provide much of the visual context for the Jackson in Exeter story. Much of early photographic theory centred on photography's indexical nature. That is, the physical relationship between the photographically-created image and the object it represents. The fact that the image is created by a photo-chemical reaction, essentially recording a subject through light (photography = 'light-drawing'), lent credence to the notion that photography's indexicality documents an objective 'reality' and 'truth' (Bazin and Gray, 1960). However, this idea has been widely discredited and scholars from Baudrillard to Sontag have questioned

this claim of veracity: ‘photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are’ (Sontag, 2002, pp.6-7).

The concept of the photo as document or as evidence struck me as I was in another local history archive, the North Devon Athenaeum in Barnstaple. I was visiting to investigate the ‘Michael Jackson’ 1999 Barnstaple gig via Barnstaple’s local paper, the *North Devon Journal*. As outlined in the thesis prologue, this was a concert held in Barnstaple’s Queen Theatre. The headline act was advertised as a ‘very special guest’ (Brindley, 1999, p. 3) with many images and phrases which would lead the targeted audience to believe this was Michael Jackson. When the concert was finished, the audience was split. Many were angry that they had been duped, that they had spent their money on a Jackson fake. Many other audience members refused to believe it wasn’t Jackson, even after his PR team had publicly confirmed that it wasn’t him; he was too good an entertainer to *not* be the real Jackson.

The *North Devon Journal* newspaper articles included quotes from audience members who stated that ‘when he [the performer] started dancing, we *knew* it was him [Jackson]’ (in Cooper, 1999, p. 3). Later newspaper articles narrate how it was, in fact, Matt Fiddes (strangely, also the head of security at the Exeter City Jackson visit) who arranged the concert, with some asserting that he had hired a lookalike, and others saying that it was Fiddes himself performing a Jackson tribute act. As an artist-researcher, my interest didn’t really lie in whether or not it was the real Jackson performing, but that so many of the audience members believed the tribute act as the originary, even after having the claims disproved: ‘I shook hands with him. I saw Michael Jackson and held my hand out and he shook it and said hello. I believe it was Michael Jackson and I would like proof of that’ (Sue Piercy in Cooper, 1999, p. 3).



Archival image used in *No Such Event Took Place*, credited to Richard Lappas

Other than the newspaper write ups, the only documentation of the gig available via searches online and in the archive was a single photographic image. This image is blurry, with no area in sharp focus at all. What can be made out is a figure on the centre of a stage, wearing a white jacket, black trousers, and with a white fedora hat with a black ribbon around it in their hand. The other hand is stretched out towards the camera and the audience, the head is tilted to the performers' left shoulder. The viewer is unable to make out what else is on the stage; there are blurry shapes either side of the performer which could be speakers or something else altogether. In the foreground, in front of the stage, can be seen many blurry shapes, which could be hands in the air, possibly some clapping. The quality of the image is very poor, and what looks like sprocket holes are visible along the top edge, leading me to believe that this is a photographic image developed from a film negative. Given the poor quality of the photograph, with its lack of focus and under exposed image, I also think that it could be from a disposable camera. I was

surprised that the *North Devon Journal* used this in the article as it is so difficult to ‘read’ the image, but there is something about the figure on stage that undeniably signifies Jackson. While the outfit connotes the 1988 ‘Smooth Criminal’ era Jackson, the stance signals Jackson’s singular virtuosic dance style. Whether or not the figure is Jackson, a lookalike, or someone with no visual resemblance at all is unclear from the image. But there is a confidence and swagger there: the figure confronts both the camera and audience in a compelling way - no small feat for what looks like a series of pastel blobs in the photo.

The photograph is credited in the news article to a Richard Lappas. I took a print out of the microfilm newspaper reel showing the image, and as I paid for the print out the archivist, Naomi Ayre, told me that the North Devon archive also hosts the photographic negative archives of the *North Devon Journal*, and asked if I’d like to order a print and digital scan from the original negative. We then flipped through the October 1999 negative archive, finding other fascinating images in more detail, like the photographs showing Jackson fan Maria Williams holding her signed *Off The Wall* CD. Williams met the tribute artist, received ‘Jackson’s’ signature, and it was only when looking at this more closely at home, and realising that ‘Michael’ was spelt incorrectly, that she began to doubt that the performer was the real Jackson. However, where the negative of the lead image - the blurry photo of the performer centre stage - should be in the negative folder, there was nothing. There were several people mentioned in the article’s reporting on the performance, many of whom I wanted to talk to, and I added the photographer, Richard Lappas, to the list, to ask him about the missing, technically inexpert but enigmatic photograph.

Lappas was easy to track down, and kindly agreed to speak with me via email and phone about the event and photograph (Lappas and Richards, 2016). The event and the figure of Matt Fiddes

were known to him, and he had in fact covered the Jackson Exeter visit for a national paper as well. However, checking his archives, he stated that he had never attended the Barnstaple hoax Jackson gig. He also knew as soon as he looked at the image that it was not one he had authored - in fact, he said (half jokingly) that it was an affront to his professionalism that he could have been thought to have taken such an out of focus image. The reason why he was credited as the photographer was that it was a 'collect photo'; where a photographer acts on behalf of someone who wants to submit a photo to a newspaper or a magazine, and helps negotiate the fee for the image, any future royalties, etc. The fact that it was a collect photo explains why the negative was missing from the paper's photographic archive. Richard had no record of who authored the image, and so the 'trail' of the photograph went cold.

My conversations with Lappas were one of many when trying to find out more about the Barnstaple concert. As discussed in the thesis prologue, I had contacted two tribute artists - Anthony King and Navi - possible performers at the event, and heard nothing from King, and a refusal to confirm or deny involvement from Navi. Using LinkedIn, I contacted several people who were working at the Queen's Theatre at that time: not a very fruitful route as they either couldn't remember the event or were too busy to discuss the experience in detail. Matt Fiddes, meanwhile, denied the event even happened. This denial made me return to the idea of the photograph as 'evidence'. Clearly, for some reason, Fiddes was misdirecting, as there were many eyewitnesses quoted in the articles. While the photograph cannot be considered as clear incontrovertible evidence, as Susan Sontag states in her influential text *On Photography*, photographs can and do:

furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it...The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. Whatever the limitations (through amateurism) or pretensions (through artistry) of the individual

photographer, a photograph -- any photograph -- seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects (2002, pp.5-6).

I appropriated this image for *No Such Event Took Place*, a work in the exhibition *EMERGENCY*, a group show of international emerging artists at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth which opened in December 2017. *No Such Event Took Place* was an installation where a photographic print was placed on a plinth and under a museum vitrine case. A pair of headphones were attached to the plinth, which played ‘text to voice’ audio of emails from myself to various people investigating the photograph and its provenance.

To view documentation of *No Such Event Took Place*, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAeWHAA73Zo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=4>

This work explored the idea of the photograph as evidence, as well as offering a way in to the Barnstaple hoax gig narrative. The work was exhibited alongside the textile sculpture *Banner #7 (Welome)*²⁸ (discussed in Chapter Four), and an iteration of the videowork *raremjvideosI* (also discussed in Chapter Four). I printed the work as a glossy six by four inch print, referencing the consumer print size and quality by a disposable point and shoot camera, the likely camera that took this image. It was housed on a plinth under a clear museological vitrine (indeed the gallery borrowed this presentation plinth from a local museum). This presentation choice is meant to connote the photograph as a historical object, as an item of note, and something that, as Sontag states, ‘proves’ that the event, contrary to the title, *did* take place. Sound was an integral part of this work. A text to voice file read the email trails of my ‘detective work’ with the tribute artists, Matt Fiddes, journalists and photographers mentioned above. The

²⁸ An intentional misspelling: copying the banner text as is from the originary fan source material.

emails narrate the process of trying to uncover the ‘truth’ of the ‘Jackson’ performance, and the ‘truth’ and back story of the photograph. The title, quoting from Fiddes’ email stating ‘no such event took place’ when asked about the Barnstaple gig, is meant to jar with the museological presentation of the image as (possible) ‘evidence’.

In March 2019, journalist Joel Cooper got in touch with me. Cooper wrote for *Devon Live*, and was the author of the original *North Devon Journal* article which first alerted me to the Barnstaple gig, and which had been swiftly taken down. Cooper was writing an update on the ‘Jackson’ performance at Barnstaple, and had come across my research and the *No Such Event Took Place* piece during his investigations. He wanted to speak with me about the work and to get my thoughts on whether I thought the entertainer at the Queens Theatre really was Jackson or not. During these discussions, Cooper told me he had found the actual photographer of the image: the then Queen's Theatre manager, Darren Regan. Regan is quoted in Joel’s article regarding the photograph’s authorship and evidential credentials:

“I was the one who took the picture, though at the time I couldn't say it was me because photography was not allowed in the auditorium.” But while he says he still has very fond memories of the performance that night, his confidence in the sighting has wavered slightly... "To be honest, I don't know anymore - we were all so caught up in the atmosphere. It wouldn't surprise me if it was him, but I wouldn't be shocked if it wasn't. That night I was very close to the performer and if it was a look-a-like it was a very, very good one." (Regan in Cooper, 2019, online)

The debate surrounding the photograph’s evidential nature (which perhaps extends generically to any photograph) brings to mind Philip Auslander’s thoughts on performance documentation. While Sontag argues that a photograph is not evidence but does *furnish evidence*, Auslander similarly argues that photography (and all documentation) is not performance but is *performative of performance*. Auslander contends that documents of performance themselves perform; there is an inextricable link between the document and the actuality of the performance:

I am suggesting that performance documents are not analogous to constatives, but to performatives: *in other words, the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such.* (2006, p. 5, original emphasis).

Both Sontag and Auslander discuss the cyclical relationship between event/action/liveness and document/photograph/pastness, moving towards a concept of ‘again-ness’.

The photograph in *No Such Event Took Place*, and the narratives of Jackson himself, have qualities of again-ness in part because they are producerly subjects. That is, as discussed previously, a text which is both accessible (with a clear narrative) and avant-garde (with more ambiguous or abstract elements), creating a space for co-creation between author and reader because of the potential multiple readings. The photograph of the figure on the stage embodies ideas of the producerly and of again-ness. The figure in the photo is both at once unrecognisable and completely identifiable. With as little detail as it has, the figure *is* read as Jackson; even if the figure is not really him, the stance and clothing connotes the King of Pop. Here we can see the strength of Jackson’s ‘brand’ in the pop cultural consciousness. There are few celebrities who can be read from one signifier - Elvis from a lip curl, Madonna from a cone bra, Jackson from a single sequin glove - but Jackson’s image (in *No Such Event Took Place* represented by costume and gestural body configuration) is so ingrained, that an out of focus photograph of a tribute artist can still bring his presence forward. His image has been replicated so many times, he is so culturally significant, that whether through fan wish-fulfilment, a money-making hoax, or the performance finesse of a tribute artist, he is present even when he is absent. *No Such Event Took Place* and its self-evaluative questioning of provenance and ‘proof’ gives no concrete answers about whether it really was Jackson performing. Instead it acts as fanfic of the ‘Jackson’ performance, and as ‘archive fanfiction’ of the archival fragments themselves. As Auslander posits:

Perhaps the authenticity of the performance document resides in its relationship to its beholder rather than to an ostensibly originary event: perhaps its authority is phenomenological rather than ontological. Just as one can have the pleasure of hearing Sinatra sing duets with singers with whom he had no real interaction, so one can have the pleasure of seeing Klein leap into the void or that of contemplating the implications of Burden's allowing himself to be shot. These pleasures are available from the documentation and therefore do not depend on whether an audience witnessed the original event. The more radical possibility is that they may not even depend on whether the event actually happened (Auslander, 2006, p.9).

Conclusion

Both *Yes, It Really Did Happen* and *No Such Event Took Place* are examples of Steyerl's conception of poor images; their condition 'speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again' (2009, online). The 'care' demanded is in part what makes this kind of archival engagement fannish - a close reading of the material, a re-working of it as seen in fan practices such as fanfic and fan art. The Devon Heritage Centre and the North Devon Athenaeum, as the custodians of local newspaper archives, are traditionally perceived as conservative gatekeepers of these type of documents. However, through the support of the archivists and librarians, they allow playful engagements with the materials; in fact they are indicative of the kind of archives that invite interpretation, or one could say invites fannish transformation. Archival materials are 'reiterations to be acted upon' (Clarke, Jones, Kaye, and Linsley, 2015, p. 11). This careful, considered, productive engagement is integral to archival practice; as performance academic Heike Roms (2013) argues, the archive can be understood as an extension of the artwork as a time-based practice, which those working in the archive 'perform', bringing it to a permanent present.

While the methodological engagement with archival material in *Yes, It Really Did Happen* and *No Such Event Took Place* could be said to be fannishly transformative, in presentation relatively little aesthetic transformation of the material has occurred. While the work calls into

question the documents' position as 'evidence', there is simultaneously sometimes a forensic-like quality to these works. As Parry suggests, this could be because we know Jackson to be a 'suspect figure' (2018), but there is also an interrogation of archival provenance, of the nature of 'proof' - and a questioning of whether this even matters to the story. The documents used in these works are presented ambiguously; neither fact nor fiction is claimed, a palimpsest of transformation and repetition has been created, while the originary is still visible. Some of the fannish transformation occurs in the re-framing of the materials to new contexts: by placing the practice-research in gallery spaces, the archival material moves into a new cultural canon.

What a fannish approach to working with archival material recognises is its malleability, its potential. The documents' (and Jackson's star text's) producerly qualities invites reinterpretations. It is the liminal qualities of the documents that are so engaging; laying in potential, rather than in stasis, standing at the 'junction of archaeology and historiography' (Clarke, Jones, Kaye, and Linsley, 2015, p. 13). While the documents may not point to historical objectivity, they do help build a picture of how narrative viewpoints are constructed; in this case, via local media. This potential is what ties the archive to art-making: elements and narratives are unresolved, 'a distribution of points yet to be joined, to be acted out and realized as histories' (Clarke, Jones, Kaye, and Linsley, 2015, p. 14). Archival artefacts both resonate with past and future narratives, with the possibilities of again-ness. This many-tensed quality of artistic engagements with archives mirrors the conversations within performance studies, of whether performance's key quality is its ephemerality (Phelan, 1993), or its ability to remain (Schneider, 2011). The creation of *Yes, It Really Did Happen* and *No Such Event Took Place* has made me consider archival materials outside of this binary, as embodying both characteristics. The iterative and producerly potential of archival material is memory-like in its

inconsistencies, its malleability and its instabilities; encouraging re-plays which mutate and reform.

CHAPTER FOUR

RAREMJVIDEOS1: FAN METHODS OF ART-MAKING, ARCHIVED NARRATIVES, AND MYTH-MAKING

This chapter explores fannish modes of art-making which use archived narratives as source material. I created a practice-research videowork, *raremjvideos1*, in several different iterations to understand fan moving image practices. This work utilised re-edited video footage documenting Jackson's Exeter visit, appropriated from a YouTube channel. I discuss the different iterations as a fannish re-versioning process. The different versions include:

- Exhibited in Gallery 333, an intimate window gallery for micro-installations and sculptural interventions at Exeter Phoenix in September 2016. A zine work was shown alongside it. An image made for marketing purposes for this exhibition showed the banner work *Welome to Exeter*. The first work in progress performance of what was eventually titled *Like A Pantomime* (discussed in Chapter Five) was performed in the same arts complex site.
- Installed with seating sculpture, in the group exhibition *Data Ache* at Radiant Gallery, Plymouth in September 2017.
- Installed with seating sculpture in the group exhibition *EMERGENCY* at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth in December 2017 - January 2018, alongside the banner work, *Welome to Exeter*, and the photograph and sound piece *No Such Event Took Place* (the latter work discussed in Chapter Three).
- As a single screen showing in the cinema space at CCA, Glasgow, as part of Mount Florida Screening X PAC Home's programme for Glasgow International, May 2018.
- As a single screen showing in the cinema space at Plymouth Arts Centre, as part of Mount Florida Screening X PAC Home's programme for Plymouth Art Weekender,

September 2018.

- As a single screen projection in Gallery 3 at Jerwood Visual Arts as part of my solo presentation *Poor Copy*, part of Jerwood's *Staging Series* programme, September 2018.

While Chapter Three looked at material, analogue and institutional archiving and regional media's framing of the Jackson in Devon narratives, I now turn to digital, user-led, open access archives: primarily, YouTube. A search for 'Michael Jackson Exeter' on YouTube returns around 11,700 hits. I explore the qualities of YouTube videos as documents, specifically a set of videos on the channel 'raremjvideos1'. I then analyse how the YouTube platform generates meaning via 'paratexts', and explore YouTube as a platform for creative fan labour, discussing fanvids and fansubbing. I link iterative methods of making within moving image practices across fan and contemporary art cultures, and via my videowork discuss debates of appropriation, copyright, and transformation in these two spheres of production and dissemination. I discuss works by artists Mark Leckey and Jamie Shovlin to explore how key works in contemporary art engages with fandom and its archival processes, and situate my zine and banner artworks alongside these strategies of fannish myth-making. Finally, I discuss my position as a 'non-fan' when using fan modes of making, and how this is manifest and explored in the practice-research.

Artists as fans of fandom



Marketing image for Exeter Phoenix 2016 show, which also documents the banner work 'Banner #7 (Welome)'

While researching the Jackson at Exeter event, both online and in the Devon Heritage Centre archives, I was struck by how many images I saw documenting fans with homemade banners and posters which declared their passion for Jackson or the football club. The banners were an expression of creativity, but also signalled kinship within a community, and ways of stating who an individual is and what is important to them (Monaghan, 2018, online). The marketing image for the Exeter Phoenix exhibition was a photo of a person (myself) holding a large banner, a textile piece I made. This is a facsimile of a fan banner I had found in a photo documenting Jackson's Exeter visit. In the image, the person's face and body are obscured; the figure of the fan could be anyone. The text reads 'Welome [sic] to Exeter Michael', it is easy to see that materials of cheap felt pens and an old bed sheet have been used to create the restaged banner, as was used in the original. Its aesthetic is amateur-ish and handmade, the kind of fan banner created by young fans and seen in crowds at music concerts and sports events. The Jackson at Exeter event bridged these two worlds - that of music and sports fandoms.

I made several biro-drawings of fan banners proclaiming love for Michael and welcoming him to Exeter, and included these in a zine, alongside the text of the speech that Jackson gave at St James Park in Exeter.

‘Read-through’ of the zine: <https://youtu.be/clqIP1UVC-M>

Gender studies scholar Alison Piepmeier (2008) positions zines as a medium that not only engages and is created by fan communities, but actually creates ‘*embodied* communities’ (2008, p. 213); zines’ intimacy and materiality make visible the connections between pleasure, gift economies and the human body (2008, p. 234).

Fan zines, banners, and posters have been explored by a number of contemporary artists, notably Jeremy Deller, Jamie Shovlin, and Mark Leckey. Deller’s work is oft-cited as an example of a contemporary artist engaging with fan culture, due to his creation of portraits of fan communities (notably Manic Street Preachers and Depeche Mode fans).

Our Hobby Is Depeche Mode directed by Jeremy Deller and Nick Abrahams (2006):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk2thrDgFKc&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=12>

Shovlin more specifically examines fan methods of making to demonstrate their role in the construction of the fan’s idols celebrated status. Shovlin’s *Lustfaust* project (2006) underscores the ways in which fan creative practice extends and creates fannish archives. *Lustfaust* presents an archive of a fictional band, with zines, bootleg tapes, fan posters and more presented in vitrine presentation cases. The work extends to online content, with a Wikipedia page, and a MySpace page with music from the titular German glam rock style band. The project investigates ideas of authenticity, ‘the underground’, and fan communities; the ‘fan ephemera’

created for the project sits somewhere between spoof and homage. Shovlin argues that it is the fan community that helps to generate a wider understanding of the cultural product of a band, and that at the end of the project, ‘regardless of beginning fictionally, they [Lustfaust] are now a band’ (Shovlin in Jones, 2006, online). Indeed, after the 2006 exhibition of the *Lustfaust* project (part of the Beck’s Futures contemporary art prize), the ‘band’ played gigs at both arts venues and music festivals between 2007 and 2011.

Documentation of Lustfaust live at Haunch of Venison Berlin (2007):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72Md3o6dR-A&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=13>

Fannish repetition (whether based on historical events or genre tropes) is productively, the narratives spawn further stories. This method of making engages with the again-time of mythology. According to Barthes, ‘rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ("this happens *before* or *after* that") and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*)’ (Barthes, 1974, p. 16). As for Lustfaust, which seems to ‘exist’ across several temporalities, and between fact and fiction, mythic narrative production clearly points to the dualities and concurrencies between reading and writing, between then and again. For Barthes, ‘myth is a type of speech chosen by history’ (1973, p.117). Myth is a sign that is used as a signifier, with new meaning added by the cultural or historical discourses that produces and receives it, to create the signified. Fandoms and fan creative practitioners therefore are active within the sphere of myth production. Reception studies academic Ika Willis critically examines the ways in which scholars and fans have articulated a relationship between fan fiction (and I would argue wider fan creative practice) and myth. These are:

- (1) the notion of fan fiction as a form of folk culture, reclaiming popular story from corporate ownership;
- (2) the notion of myth as counterhegemonic, often feminist,

discourse; (3) the notion of myth as a commons of story and a universal story world (Willis, 2016, online).

Willis positions fanfic as mythic in part because of its hyperseriality. Willis builds on literary-critic and computer-science scholar Janet Murray's term 'hyperseriality', which Murray states is a new narrative structure in which individual stories contribute to a larger fictional experience (Murray, 1997, p. 256). For Willis, hyperseriality highlights the 'dense intertwining' of characters and stories in any narrative, and the inability to disengage with any one element from the larger network of which they are a part (2016, online); this includes not only the narrative worlds of the source materials but the social world of the re-telling. Therefore, when considering the producerly repetition in fanworks, whose methods can be seen in my practice-research, and in the work of Deller and Shovlin, we see how the source narratives and materials, the fans, and the artists all co-create and extend the myth of the fan histories we are working with.

Dream English Kid, a 2016 work by artist Mark Leckey for Liverpool Biennale, utilises archive footage of past musical events as a narrative thread for his videowork, which also examines his subjectivity within fannish myth-making. Leckey has been called the artist for the 'YouTube generation' (Higgins, 2015, online) due to his excavating of YouTube to reconstruct and extend personal memories, often of gigs or raves. *Dream English Kid* recreates a record of significant events from the artist's life from the 1970s to the 1990s, the most frequently pictured within the work is a 1979 Joy Division gig at Eric's nightclub in Liverpool that Leckey attended. While Leckey considered the event an important one, he thought of it, as most of us do our pasts, as essentially 'lost' and 'private'. Stumbling across some documentation of the gig on YouTube, he realised that he could reconstruct his own histories from the platform's traces of music, film, even adverts (Higgins, 2015, online). Leckey recognises the impossibility of creating a work that is equivalent to the initial event, but instead uses a video collage to evoke

something that feels close to the experience, something that resonates with it (Leckey in Higgins, 2015, online). The piece that made his name as an artist, *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999), also used archive footage which presented people dancing from the 1970s to the 1990s to northern soul to acid house.

Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore (1999): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dS2McPYzEE&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=1>

Both works reflect what art critic Charlotte Higgins (2015, online) posits as the ‘YouTube generation’s easy manipulation of digital sources’; sampling and editing to transform, and to celebrate forms of expression that had rarely before been the material for ‘high’ art. This wasn’t an ironic engagement with pop culture; it *was* Leckey’s culture: ‘I cried while I was making it. I make this stuff to feel joy and melancholy and sweet-sadness’ (Leckey in Higgins, 2015, online).

This affective relationship with the source material demonstrates a *jouissance* often associated with fan cultures.²⁹ For Barthes, a text which provokes *jouissance* is writerly: resisting a singular reading, evading categorisation and provoking feeling, often erotic. He writes that ‘the pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas - for my body does not have the same ideas I do’ (1998, p. 17). There is a gap of understanding between an expected narrative conformity or precise meaning, and the produced readings of slipperiness, of malleability, of materiality; these texts are not ‘phonological but phonetic’ (Barthes, 1998, p. 66). Similarly, Leckey understands that he cannot offer a portal to Eric’s, or to the dancefloors of the 1970s, but rather presents something that ‘resonates’ with those experiences.

²⁹ Barthes discusses the effects of readerly texts as giving ‘plaisir’ or pleasure, and writerly texts as giving ‘jouissance’, translated as bliss, while the French word also carries the meaning of orgasm (1998).

Jouissance has been used to describe the at times ‘uncontrollable’, even ‘excessive’ emotional outpourings of fans towards their subject of interest: be it fans at a Beatles’ concert (Poizat, 2013, p. 208), or fans cheering a football team on (Wilson, 2013, p. 31). Leckey’s *jouissance* is linked to his passion for the musical events he reconstructs, and bound up with an archival compulsion. A friend of Leckey’s describes this as a kind of ‘nostalgic sickness’, a ‘demon’; Leckey ‘was trying to rid himself of it, but also re-experience it’ (McGeown in Higgins, 2015, online). While many fans *can* be highly emotive when engaging with their subject of interest, that is not to place them within the realm of the oft- (and often mis-) reported hysterical, inarticulate fan stereotype. Performances of fannish *jouissance* are often used to invoke the problematic ‘spectre of the drooling fangirl’ (Fanlore, 2017d, online).³⁰ However personal engagements with artists’ own fandoms, as seen in Leckey’s work, can produce affective, transformative, and fascinating artworks, and also speak to fan studies’ recent call for an autoethnographic approach (Hills, 2002; Duffett, 2012).

Within *Poor Copy*, and specifically the videowork *raremjvideos1*, I was working with a history, and historical documents, with which I had no fannish connections. As discussed in the introduction, I am neither an Exeter City Football Club fan nor a Michael Jackson fan. Yet, there was a fannish *jouissance* to my making, and to my archival research (as discussed in Chapter Three); there was a joy and thrill when finding documents whose content and aesthetic spoke to my investigations into fannish archiving and fannish making, and, significantly, there

³⁰ Fangirl and fanboy often have pejorative connotations, both within mainstream press and fan cultures. The term fangirl is often employed derogatorily to mean a fan whose understanding is shallow, whose behaviour is ‘undignified’ or irrational, and often signalling solely sexual interest (Fanlore, 2017d, online). There is an argument to be made that this is perfectly acceptable fan behaviour anyway, but I do not have the space to delve into this here. In contrast, fanboy is also often used negatively, to denote immaturity, for example with reference to the collecting of toy merchandise.

was a second-hand pleasure in hearing or reading of the fans' delight in documenting or retelling their engagement with that history.

While Leckey's relationship with his source texts may be more overtly fannish (as an 'insider' at the Eric's gig), both his and my own engagement with archival material can be positioned as fannish, in that there is a drive to create and consolidate a digital cultural memory, to re-perform the material so that it doesn't get lost in the detritus of the internet. Leckey speaks of the open, almost infinite possibilities of engaging with archives:

This is the best time to be an artist and making work. It is a magical time – I mean it is unanchored and fantastical. It is terrifying and exciting. The access that you have to all points of history, through the internet, is a kind of haunting. The internet is full of ghosts. We don't know what is substantial and what is not (Leckey in Higgins, 2015, online).

The invocation of the ghost conjures up the multi-temporal complexities of reworking the archival material. Perhaps it is the emphasis on memory that blurs the lines between 'then' and 'again'. Through the making of *raremjvideos1*, I was exploring how, for both fans and artists, producerly archival material might become a springboard for new creative work, rather than an end unto itself.

Uri Geller's videocamera

From the almost 12,000 videos that appeared in my 'Michael Jackson Exeter' YouTube search, there was one particular series of videos, from one particular YouTube channel, which really struck me. It had a strange, jerky, first-person point of view angle, which made it at times difficult to understand what was happening on camera. Taken individually, few of these videos had enough visual or aural information to be able to easily be read as documenting the Jackson in Exeter history. You often needed the video title or description to anchor an understanding.

But as I read this paratextual information, I started to infer why the ‘raremjvideos1’ channel existed, and the motivations behind it. Each title or description prominently alluded to Matt Fiddes. For example, the video which documents Jackson trying to board the train from London to Exeter is titled ‘Michael Jackson talking to Matt Fiddes’ and has this description:

Michael Jackson being bodyguarded by his close friend and martial arts celebrity Matt Fiddes. In this clip it is cute where Michael asks for a mural to be passed to Matt! Give it to Matt! (Fiddes) Give it to Matt! Give it to Matt at 37 seconds of this video clip! Interesting as this puts to rest the rumours and critics that believed Michael Jackson did not know who Matt was! It is clear from this video clip he does and very well! All the way to the end of the struggle to the train it is only Matt Fiddes by Michael Jacksons side! What a life Michael has had just to board a train to Devon! (Exeter). (rareMJvideos1, 2013, online)³¹

Each title and description had a similar emphasis (and a similar reliance on exclamation marks and an aversion to spell-check): ‘Cute how Michael Jackson is so concerned that Matt Fiddes is not by his side. shows how close to two were behind closed doors. Always looking for Matt Fiddes!’; ‘Michael Jackson being watched and filmed by his head of security and close friend martial arts celebrity Matt Fiddes. Matt Fiddes is seen in the chase car filming Michael Jackson in a chase care to protect him from lawsuits and false allegations at the request of Michael Jackson!’; ‘Michael Jackson inside his bedroom mixing with his friends including his former bodyguard and one of his closest friends Martial Arts Celebrity Matt Fiddes and others. Verry funny insight to Michaels private space and the real Michael Jackson! Shows how close they all were to mix together in the same room!’ (rareMJvideos1, 2013, online).

This additional information directs viewers to one very particular conclusion: that Jackson is reliant on and friendly with Fiddes. In Chapter Three, I discussed how the intertextual narratives of Jackson, and the incidental news stories adjacent to the texts I focused on in the

³¹ All citations from this YouTube channel includes spelling and grammatical errors present in the video description and other paratexts.

videowork *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, helped frame particular readings or connotations of the Jackson in Exeter history. On the YouTube platform, this intertextual information is provided by paratexts. Paratextual information, such as video titles and descriptions on YouTube, or with traditional print media titles, book titles, testimonials from other authors, and promotional descriptions, all seek to give context to, and thus contain and direct meaning-making of, the central text. Fan scholar Maria Lindgren Leavenworth builds on Gérard Genette's delineation of the paratext, applying it to fanfic published online. She states that every context both serves as and *creates* a paratext (Leavenworth, 2015, p. 46).

In the case of the 'raremjvideos1' YouTube channel, the form of YouTube publishing which requires a title and description has been used to not hint at a reading, but rather nail it down and constrict its meaning, to manipulate the material to create propaganda. The insistent, overblown and ill-written paratext led me to resist the desired reading, and also to doubt the overbearing claims of friendship posited there. Watching the videos on the channel again, and reading each description, I came to believe that 'rareMJvideos1' was authored by Fiddes himself. Who else would benefit by putting such a spin on videos of Jackson, constantly linking him to a tabloid 'celebrity martial artist and bodyguard'?

On the second viewing, I began to pick out the voice behind the camera. It was the distinct, flat, Israeli-Cypriot accented voice of Uri Geller. In the raremjvideos1 images, we saw Fiddes in a couple of the videos in front of the camera, but never did we see Geller; instead it is his voice which often directs the action: 'Michael, get on the train', 'Children, hold Michael's hand'. The conclusion I came to was that Fiddes had uploaded video that Geller had taken, documenting the events in Exeter. Within the *Express and Echo* archives, there was a media-constructed historiography; within the YouTube platform, it is a user-driven historiography.

The title of the channel suggests it is fan-driven, but my interpretation of the provenance and paratext suggests that this is not the case with this particular channel. I appropriated the title of the YouTube channel 'raremjvideos1' for the title of my practice-research videowork, to clearly signal back to the source material.

I considered what the source archival material actually was: both a YouTube video, and what was essentially a home movie. Henry Jenkins (2006, pp. 274-5) defines YouTube as having three specificities within the larger cultural economy. Its first key characteristic is a space where different media-creating communities converge; from professional media producers, to amateur and semi-professional content producers. This shared media portal encourages cross-collaboration and discussion in unpredictable ways. Secondly, it functions as a media archive where amateur 'curators' can bring content they find meaningful to larger audiences; a dissemination platform where you can 'freeze a moment out of the "flow" of mass media and try to focus greater attention on what just happened' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 275). Third, its archive is inherently shareable, linked as it is across other social media platforms. Participation occurs across three different levels: production, selection, and distribution. Jenkins positions YouTube as 'ground zero' for the disruption of commercial mass media, creating a space for the production and dissemination for grassroots media.

Using the videos which I believed to be produced by Geller (who organised the event) and distributed by Fiddes (who was head of security at the event) positioned the viewpoint as within the narrative, at the heart of the event, close to Jackson looking outwards, rather than from a fan position looking inwards. The raremjvideos1 uploads are not constructed to document the event in a clean linear way, as a media outlet would. Jackson is often on the fringes of the videos, unlike how he is positioned within fan videos. This 'insider' view, together with the

handheld POV angle, positions the video material as ‘home movie’. This genre of video-making is intricately linked to memory (both memory-making and memory-storage), and focuses almost exclusively on the personal (Van Alphen, 2014, p. 238). The *raremjvideos1* series then, underscores celebrities’ private lives being made public; a celebrity’s ‘home-movie’ shared with the world. Within a fan context, in a pre-social media landscape, this gives a rare ‘insider’ insight into the fan-subject.

The videos I used within my edit for the artwork *raremjvideos1* had a very particular quality, which seem distinctly pre-YouTube. In fact they were filmed pre-YouTube, since the Jackson Exeter visit happened three years before YouTube launched in 2005. It was also filmed on what I think was a DV or mini-DV³² cam judging from the visual quality. In 2002, smartphones with cameras weren’t ubiquitous; they did not gain mass popularity in the UK until the mid to late 2000s. Whoever was filming the event, therefore, was probably not doing so to share on the internet. The videos had not been affected by the rapidly developing visual language of YouTube. As it is such a huge archive, it is hard to pin down specific qualities that define a ‘typical’ YouTube video. However, the videos I use as source material seem markedly different from the most celebrated YouTube genres. They have none of the humour or cuteness of cameraphone-created viral videos of pratfalls or pets; they have none of the speaking to camera of vlogs;³³ they have none of the slickness of commercially produced interviews, news-spots, or trailers; they have none of the metatextuality³⁴ of fanvids. By disassociating the video clips on the *rareMJvideos1* channel from the paratext of titles and descriptions, I dislocated them

³² DV is a format for storing video on magnetic tape. MiniDV was aimed at the amateur market and could hold around one hour of footage (Wikipedia, 2019c, online).

³³ A vlog is a type of video content which documenting an individual’s thoughts or life similar to a blog. It is often platformed on YouTube. (Fanlore, 2019c, online).

³⁴ Metatextuality is a text which explicitly or implicitly references one or more texts. It ‘unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it’ (Genette, 1997b, p. 4).

from their previous context. Their confusing handheld qualities seem memory-like in their softness of focus, their confusion, and as Ernst Van Alphen (2014, p. 239) says of home movies, they were ‘structured like a dream’.

Returning to Jenkins, by selecting these videos I aim to refocus attention amongst the sea of media and narratives, but instead of editing, and resharing online via social media, my audience is ‘IRL’ (in real life), via the series of exhibitions and screenings listed in the introduction of this Chapter. These different contexts allowed me the opportunity to create different edits and installations of *raremjvideos1*. I will unpack how different genres of fanworks have influenced these difference iterations.

Vidding and videograbby

Current edit of *raremjvideos1*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOQtNZuCyzk&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe&index=2>

The first stage of my material intervention into the online video documentation of the Jackson in Exeter event was to select which videos I wanted to incorporate into the work. I chose to use all videos from the *raremjvideos1* channel which showed Jackson travelling to or in Exeter; they all seemed to be filmed by Geller and had the same home movie quality. Before editing, I had to download them, which I did using a website called ‘VideoGrabby’. The legality of downloading these videos is contentious, and returns us to the fannish conception of transformation discussed in Chapter One. YouTube’s terms of use (2010, online) states:

L. Content....is not intended to be downloaded (either permanently or temporarily), copied, stored, or redistributed by the user.

M. You shall not copy, reproduce, distribute, transmit, broadcast, display, sell, license, or otherwise exploit any Content for any other purposes without the prior written consent of YouTube or the respective licensors of the Content.

However, its fair use statement (2017, online) has four key criteria, the first of which focuses on whether or not it is transformative. YouTube describes this as ‘whether it adds new expression or meaning to the original, or whether it merely copies from the original’. It also says that fair use is more likely to be granted if using factual material, is dependent on how much material is used (the shorter the extract the better), and the intention to make a monetary profit. Research is often cited as having the potential for fair use (2017, online), so as my downloads were to create a practice-research artwork which examines fan moving image and myth-making practices, I would argue that my videowork is within this frame.

Appropriating existing video material to create something new can be seen in the fanac culture of ‘vidding’. Fanvids are created by fans, by taking material from TV shows, films, and occasionally music videos, and editing this material, often setting it to an existing song. Fanvids may be concerned with shipping, fan theories, or may function as a medium for narrative storytelling or visual poetry, a form of visual essay that explains the vid creator’s understanding of the source text; reframing the original narrative in a new way (Turk in Fanlore, online, 2015). The rise of basic video editing software such as Windows Movie Maker and iMovie, coupled with the popularity of YouTube, made digital vidding a popular subculture within fandom, even a fandom within its own right with Vividcon, a convention for vidders and vid fans held in Chicago each year since 2002 (Fanlore, 2017c, online). There are no stylistic norms within vidding; other than that the original source material are transformed through editing.³⁵ In fact AMV (Anime Music Video) vidders refer to themselves as ‘editors’ (Fanlore, 2017c, online).

³⁵ Mirroring a mode of making in experimental film: that of appropriation.

Can the *raremjvideos1* artwork I made be labelled as a fanvid? There is very little editing compared to the traditions of most vids. This was a conscious choice. I chose to re-present the videos from the rareMJvideos1 channel ‘as is’ for a number of reasons: the aesthetic and narrative qualities gave the history little narrative clarity, and any further editing would complicate this further; despite my scepticism of documentation and historical truth, I *did* re-present the moving image as some sort of ‘evidence’, albeit one which is so highly subjectively read that it doesn’t ‘prove’ very much at all; I had made the decision to use all of the channel’s videos that related to the event, to demonstrate the channel’s role in the myth-making of the Jackson in Exeter event - if I then edited out parts of the videos, this choice would be redundant. I placed the videos in the order that I thought made most chronological sense; possibly a strange choice for someone interested in a refutation of the notion of historical veracity, but one that made sense given the instability of the original videos and their openness towards multiple readings. The context of chronology helps to anchor the footage towards the narrative of Jackson at Exeter; it gives the balance of giving the viewer a ‘hook’ into the story, without giving everything away. I chose not to use transitions, as I wanted to leave the videos as ‘raw’ as possible; giving the viewer a hazy, dreamlike, almost undercover insight into the events of that day. Despite not using multiple visual sources, or adding a new soundtrack, the source material is explored in a new way, and focuses on a central character (that of Jackson); key markers of the mode of vidding. The producerly qualities of the source material results in a fannishly producerly artwork: embracing ‘popular’ qualities and pleasures of production and participation, while also drawing attention to its own textuality, *raremjvideos1* is ‘involved in the process of representation rather than a victim of it’ (Fiske, 2010, p. 95).

Does this relative lack of editing mean that I am in breach of copyright, then? Sarah Trombley, positions fanvids as a microcosm of the kind of copyright issues that contemporary art in the digital age is likely to encounter, when the artist uses appropriation as a key method, (2007, p.

684). The inherent citability of the internet, coupled with an increasingly litigious late-capitalist society, means that the art of vidding, with its outputs of creative freedom with little damaging impacts, are in danger of at worst having its creators sued, and at best having the vids erased from platforms. Trombley suggests that US copyright is failing the vidders; where the vidders are not making a profit from the source material, the practice opens up a platform for self-expression, and often political or social commentary (2007, p. 684).³⁶

Trombley places fanvids within the same sphere of art production as contemporary visual art. ‘Remix culture’ has saturated art writing since the turn of the twenty-first century. Curator and art writer Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Postproduction: culture as screenplay: how art reprograms the world* (2002) is one of the most influential texts on this subject. Bourriaud frames a trend within contemporary art of plundering the ‘storehouse of history...to inventory and select, to use and download’ (2002, p.87). He positions artists as postproducers, alongside DJs, programmers and hackers, using methods such as cutting, dubbing, editing and remixing. For Bourriaud, as for vidders, this remixing of existing material is a way to move from a passive consumption of media and of history, to an active engagement:

To denounce or “critique” the world? One can denounce nothing from the outside; one must first inhabit the form of what one wants to criticize. Imitation is subversive, much more so than discourses of frontal opposition that only make formal gestures of subversion. (2002, p. 68)

³⁶ An example of a fanvid which has a strong claim to being transformative but also is open to legal critique is the YouTube video ‘Willow/Hermione - All The Things She Said’. This fanvid is an example of femslash (an imagined romantic or sexual relationship between two female characters; in this example, editing footage of the witch Willow from the television series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, and of the witch Hermione from the *Harry Potter* films). The music the fanvid uses is Russian duo t.A.T.u.’s song *All The Things She Said*, whose lyrics describe female friends developing romantic feelings for each other. The transformative properties of this fanvid queers the heteronormative canon of *Harry Potter*. However, the use of the song is full and unedited, and so could fall foul of copyright laws (Schwabach, 2011, p. 89).

Remixing and imitating are not self-pitying sighs that everything has already been done. They are an intentional *thinking-through* of the representations of the world, a way of creating new ‘pathways through signs’ (p. 12).

Fanvids most certainly fall within Bourriaud’s description of postproduction art as ‘specialized works of cultural reappropriation’ (2002, p. 19). Their creators are engaging with digital material, saying something new with it, reclaiming it: ‘To use an object is necessarily to interpret it... use is an act of micropirating that constitutes postproduction’ (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 18). The very selection and re-presenting of a narrative is to re-interpret it. But while vidding traditionally engages with fictive worlds, for Bourriaud, postproduction also ‘reedit[s] historical narratives, inserting the elements that compose them into alternative scenarios’ (2002, p. 39). The creation of an ‘alternative scenario’ may mean reading and re-writing one’s own subjectivity within the narrative; evoking Foucault, Bourriaud decries that we must ‘stop playing walk-on parts in a script written by power. We must become its actors or co-writers’ (2002, p. 46). The ‘co’ of the ‘co-writers’ is important here, conveying that the postproduction artist is not subservient to the author of the originary. Instead they can be seen to be demolishing the hierarchies between ‘original-creator’ and ‘remixer’.

If we apply Bourriaud’s theory of postproduction to *raremjvideos1*, then even selecting and re-contextualising the video material can be considered a significant creative act. By grafting a fanfic mode of making onto an artistic research methodology when engaging with YouTube, a feedback loop of production-selection-distribution-production is established. The creator of fanfic selects a source text, then produces a response and publishes it online, which is then selected by another reader, possibly shared online, possibly responded to, and so on. I chose to select a visual representation of a narrative that had already been produced, to edit (or select) and re-frame it in an installation (produce) in order to demonstrate the way that methods of

fanvidding and methods of postproduction artworks are appropriative in a critically and creatively iterative way. They both work with producerly texts to *create* new producerly texts. The producerly text ‘offers itself up to popular production . . . it has loose ends that escape its control, its meanings exceed its own power to discipline them, its gaps are wide enough for whole new texts to be produced in them - it is, in a very real sense, beyond its own control’ (Fiske, 1989, p. 104).

Re- re-versioning Jackson

The initial presentation of *raremjvideos1* was in Exeter Phoenix’s Gallery 333 space, in September 2016. This is an intimate ‘window’ gallery space with a glass door, sized 125cm high by 74 cm wide and 36cm deep. I showed the videowork in a solo commission, alongside a zine, discussed above, and a performance, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Five. Exeter Phoenix’s Gallery 333 offers an unusual vitrine-like nook in which to present work. Encasing something in a space which is reminiscent of a museum vitrine activates whatever is presented within. It enshrines, preserves, underlines, draws attention to, and connotes the idea that this is something of note: look at it, it’s special. Behind the vitrine, it can’t be handled - paused, skipped through, or dismissed - it is engaged with by looking, not touching. The associations with museums and other educational and heritage sites further calls to mind the framing of the interior contents as ‘historical’; that is, as something that acts as ‘evidence’ or ‘proof’ of a narrative that is worth remembering. By removing a string of YouTube clips from the screen of my laptop, and re-framing it within the vitrine, I aimed to temporarily halt the flow of audio-visual data of the social media network, asking viewers to consider this footage that they otherwise would most likely never see. The monitor and DVD player used within the vitrine were not the standard HD flatscreen or cube monitors that you would normally find in contemporary art galleries or museums; instead I used a consumer grade screen and DVD

player, wires on show, which was manufactured around 2002. Transferring the footage from YouTube, which did not exist at the time of filming, to a platform of presentation that was contemporaneous with the source acts as another signifier of the event's 'past-ness'.

The zine was placed next to the video, and was able to be handled and read. The *rareMJvideos1* channel did not have a video which showed the speech itself - the crescendo of the Jackson Exeter visit - presumably because Geller was on stage with Jackson, as other video documentation shows. I therefore didn't include video footage of the speech in the videowork, but felt that the speech should be in the installation in some way to help anchor the readings of the video, and to give at least some form of 'narrative closure' to the installation. Without the performance of Jackson delivering the speech, the text seemed even stranger and more absurd than the actual footage. Via the zine comprising its text, the speech could be 'performed' within the mind of the viewer while engaging with the related video. While the screen of *raremjvideos1* was trapped by the vitrine window, the accompanying zine was an invitation to viewers to engage with the speech text and accompanying biro drawings of fan banners in a much closer and haptic way.

The paratext of the wall blurb with title, artist name, etc, also gave information about the related performance, through which the audience were offered another way into the speech: it was reenacted, and they were positioned as the fans at St James' park. The interrelated works were a network of reveals and concealments of the central focus of spectacle - that is, Michael Jackson's speech at Exeter City Football Club. What was denied in one aspect of the project was platformed in another. This strategy worked within this gallery, and possibly this gallery only. Sited as it is in the hometown of the narrative, many visitors to the exhibition would already have some knowledge of the event. Perhaps they had only heard rumours, perhaps they

thought it an urban legend. to reference this, I used the *Exeter Express and Echo*'s headline from the day after the event to title the zine: *Yes, It Really Did Happen*³⁷.

Multiple exhibition platforms for this body of work gave me opportunities to reconsider these artworks, the video material in particular. The first re-edit was for the Data Ache exhibition (September 2017, Radiant Gallery, Plymouth), a practice-research exhibition as part of the 21st International Conference of Digital Research in the Humanities and Arts (DRHA). There were some differences with this new context for showing this artwork: the first that it was no longer shown in the town that the event first took place in. This different context of site/space was the first consideration I tackled. Within fan studies, Cornel Sandvoss has written about the different spaces of fandom, including: physical spaces of consumption (such as living rooms, concert arenas, cinemas), spaces of representation of those physical spaces, the virtual realm of fan narratives, and public spaces of fan 'pilgrimage' (Sandvoss in Duffett, 2013, p. 221). Bringing this artwork into a gallery space brought several of these fan spaces together in that galleries are sites of cultural consumption; I evoked fan YouTube channels with the video content and paratext of the title; and I decided to represent the originary event's site by way of a new installation decision. I sourced some used sports stadium seating, coloured red as at Exeter City's St James Park, and sited this on the gallery floor opposite the television screen. This became the seating from which to engage with the video, and which also underscored the site of the Jackson speech.

The site of St James is a complex one. It most strongly connotes another fan community: that of the football club's fans. But as I learnt through interviewing several fans who were there at

³⁷ At this point in the research project, I had not yet made the videowork at Devon Heritage Centre which I also titled *Yes, It Really Did Happen*.

the Jackson speech (discussed in Chapter Five), the site is a palimpsest of different performance histories; it has seen popular circuses, football games, and visits from pop icons. Such a site is activated by fans as well as performers, and can be read as a ‘cult geography’ which has accrued ‘sacredness’ from its association from icons and performance texts (Hills, 2002, p. 156). When empty, it still seems to be somehow resonant of its past performances, a lieu de memoire where cultural memory ‘crystallizes and secretes itself’ (Nora, 1996, p. 7). The use of the stadium chairs links the digital-spatial video material back to the physical-spatial of the originary site. By placing the chairs in the gallery, speaking more generally as they do of stadia and arenas, they state: watch this, it is worthy of looking, there is a performance here.

The group show format meant that there was neither conceptual or physical space for additional related works such as the zine or performance to help ground the reading of the videowork. I felt that having Jackson’s speech missing from the piece would make it too difficult for a viewer to engage with, because there would be little to no ‘narrative hook’ to draw their attention within the often confusing POV footage. It was important to continue the methodological process of only using the footage from the raremjvideos1 channel, using only footage shot by Geller. How could I work within the boundaries of the method of making that I had set myself? I made three new versions of the video to potentially show in *Data Ache*, each of which drew in different ways from fan methods of video making: that is, vidding, as discussed previously, and fansubbing.

A fansub is a video which has been subtitled by fans, so that other fans who can’t understand the original language can engage with the material. For example, there is a large community of fans who create fansubs for anime (Fanlore, 2017b, online). Not all fansubs are for feature length films or television programmes, though, as I found when searching for footage of the

Jackson Exeter speech. This returned fansubs with Greek, Turkish, Italian, Spanish and Thai subtitles on the first page. This demonstrates the very international reach of what locally is regarded as a hidden history, and in some cases doubted as having taken place. Most of the fansubs of this event are created by Jackson themed channels, such as 'MJTurkiye.com'. Some of the fansubs were to solely subtitle. Others created a fansub/fanvid hybrid, creating photomontages, adding emotive music, and adding additional text within the video stating their fannish feelings for Jackson. The originary text of the footage is modified in ways that extends fannish pleasures (Duffett, 2013, p. 187).

While making a new iteration of the artwork, I made several new edits. The three new versions of the video inserted, in different ways, the speech in the chronology of my prior edit, the Exeter Phoenix version. The first new version used Jackson speech footage from another YouTube channel but with a similar aesthetic feel; the second used a fansub/fanvid hybrid of the speech with some additional material from an Italian Jackson fan channel; and the third used only text - as if creating English-language subtitles but with no audio-visual reference.

The footage without subtitles was very similar to the Geller footage from the raremjvideos1 channel. It was jerkily shot from a first-person point of view; it had a similar quality of a handheld consumer DV camera; it also was reminiscent of a home-movie. Higher quality news coverage footage of the speech placed the image-making back into the hands of the traditional media producing sphere, whereas the additional footage I selected was from a fan's point of view. The key difference was that at times the camera was a lot further away from Jackson, so it didn't have an 'insider' feel. The edit for this version subsequently held more narrative information for viewers, but the aesthetic flow of the sound and image was not interrupted.

The video from the Italian Jackson fan channel, by theprincessdebora, used the same fan-shot footage above, but it was bookended by fan edits which are tropes of vidding: montages, use of music, text which reflects her own reading of the event as fan. Placing this within the original edit created an extreme contrast; the highly compressed sound of Jackson's 'All The Lost Children' over a photomontage of Jackson in Exeter produced an unsettling and strange effect.

The version with only the text of Jackson's speech offered the most impactful aesthetic break of the new edits, and is the one I chose to exhibit. It echoes methods of fansubbing by giving textual information, but removes the audio and moving image information. The text-only version works in a similar way as the zine did in the Exeter Phoenix presentation, in that it denies the viewer the audio-visual climax of the bizarre event, but enables it to become, if possible, even weirder, by being performed in the mind of the viewer. This version also doesn't stray from the 'rules' of production that I had previously set myself; the only archival footage used is that which is filmed by Geller.

Just as the paratext of the YouTube footage channel names, channel bios, video titles and descriptions all led me to read the footage in a certain way, so too the paratext of an exhibition reframes the artworks within it. The curatorial framing of the Data Ache exhibition emphasised an artistic engagement with data, networked communities, and media and culture made accessible, shareable and malleable through its status as data. This was shared through the exhibition information sheet and website. I also considered how the title and handout text could further frame this version; while the title *raremjvideos1* referenced the source channel, I also used the materials/dimension section to further explain this: 'Archive footage sourced from YouTube'. As media scholar Jonathan Gray argues, paratexts are not additional to the text, they actually create and alter them:

[A] film or program is but one part of a text, the text always being a contingent entity, either in the process of forming or transforming or vulnerable to further formation or transformation. (2010, pp. 6-7)

While the exhibition paratext does help to frame readings of the work, not all viewers engage with these. The addition of the speech text then provides an additional narrative anchor into the strange and perhaps unbelievable Jackson at Exeter City Football Club history.

With each additional exhibition opportunity emerged new paratexts, and new artworks to be read in and around. While I continued using the new edit for *raremjvideos1*, the new exhibition contexts have continued to change the work's reception. Each new platform meant a new consideration of paratexts and contexts, leading to an iterative editing and re-presenting process that itself mirrors fanac modes of making. Similar to how fanworks can be reblogged or shared online, curators' exhibition and programming choices create new contexts for artwork.

Abigail De Kosnik, building on Dick Hebdige's work on versioning in popular music, offers the term 'versioning' to describe the creative potential in this appropriative and iterative technique. Versioning is:

an invocation of someone else's voice to help you say what you want to say...And every time the other voice is borrowed in this way, it is turned away slightly from what it was the original author or singer or musician thought they were saying, singing, playing...That's the beauty of quotation. The original takes on a new life or beauty in a new context (Hebdige in De Kosnik, 2016, p. 302).

De Kosnik positions creative appropriation 'as an act of memory that gives onto an act of versioning', which is a performative act (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 304). De Kosnik's term also references the use of versioning in software development: where source text is refined by iterative testing and redevelopment. Appropriative moving images works which use archival fragments encapsulate this re-versioning process. I have chosen to add the re- prefix to De

Kosnik's term to further emphasise repetition; etymologically 're' comes from Latin meaning 'again and again'. Re-versioning as artistic method moves historical documents from the archive into a new context, adding to the mythologising of the originary.

Conclusion

It has been argued that as the role of archive in contemporary society increases, the role of narrative decreases (Van Alphen, 2014, p. 7) and that narrative clarity is on the wane. But the postmodern suspicion of meta-narratives - of modernity, mythical stories, and religion (Van Alphen, 2014, p. 8) - opens up a space for creative practitioners to create their own myths. Artistic engagements with archives are producerly, in that they both respond to and extend archival texts. By plundering documentary fragments (whether from institutional or fan-created archives), practitioners (whether fan artists or contemporary artists) embrace the openness and flexibility in producerly texts to construct history anew.

The multi-versioned videowork *rareMJvideosI* responds to archives created and maintained by techno-volunteers, using these archives' paratexts and curation to influence my reading of the event of Jackson's speech at Exeter City. By examining Jackson fan archives, we see how a narrative that is mis- or under-reported, mis-understood, and/or mis-believed within a local community, can be given agency and credence to a fan audience by fan labour methods such as fanvidding and fansubbing. The narrative of the Exeter visit, and its documentation which I chose to use within my work, is unstable, open and unfinished. They invited fannish interpretations.

Within my artworks, as well as those discussed by Shovlin and Leckey, there is a mobius loop of responding to and producing archival material: these texts beget texts. As Henry Jenkins

states, fandom celebrates ‘not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings (though its interpretive practice makes it impossible to maintain a clear or precise distinction between the two)’ (1992, p. 284). Binaries of reading/writing and documenting/performing are blurred. However, when creating artwork from documentary fragments, there is a danger that the temporal and narrative incoherence, and resistance to closure, might make it so difficult to engage with that audience simply won’t bother. But a producerly artwork creates a ‘semiotic democracy’ between author and audience, promoting multiple readings - it can be enjoyed and read on the surface, or engaged with in a deeper way.

The zine, banner, and videoworks discussed in this chapter used fan creative production methods to respond to archival fragments in fannish ways, extending fan documents and creating what can be considered a new fannish archive of the Jackson at Exeter event. Each artwork can be read as a producerly text which coalesces around the Jackson visit, offering an intriguing and incomplete access point to the narrative. These narrative ‘ways in’ are augmented by the paratexts of other artworks and exhibition texts which surround them, similar to how fanworks are augmented by being reposted, reblogged and responded to online. Both postproduction art and fanac use repetition to platform subjectivity; the notion of an established canon (and at times narrative clarity) are set aside, to embrace fannish myth-making. When re-presenting archival texts, myth and memory blur the lines between ‘then’ and ‘again’. Memory has come loose from its fixed place in the production cycle; cultural memory in fannish methods of production come before, after, and during the process of making.

The practice-research discussed in this chapter embraces methods of making which make evident the role of creative repetition in the myth-making process: producerly practices,

hyperseriality, and versioning techniques. The practice-research acts as fan art *of* fan art, and appropriates fanac modes of moving image. However, the work is clearly positioned as working neither within Exeter football or Jackson fandoms. In fact, my editorial decisions in the work have almost obscured or erased the physicality of Jackson's image. The climax of the video, Jackson's speech, is represented by subtitles and a black screen. His absence is conspicuous, and in the rest of the video we catch only glimpses of him. To echo Mark Leckey's words on the internet and ghostings, Jackson's lack of visible digital presence in the piece haunts this video and his histories shadow our readings.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIKE A PANTOMIME: ORAL HISTORIES AND FAN HISTORIOGRAPHIES

The Michael Jackson visit to Exeter City Football Club event provided a rich case-study for investigating fan communities' archival practices from two different fan perspectives: Michael Jackson fans and Exeter City Football Club fans. I created a versioned performance work, *Like A Pantomime*, to explore these fan historiographies via their oral histories. The different versions of the performance are detailed in the Introduction Chapter and discussed later in this chapter, but the key differences are:

- The first version was shown at Exeter Phoenix in October 2016 as a live event which related to the Gallery 333 exhibition discussed in Chapter Four. The performance was in two parts: the first part used verbatim dialogue from both Exeter City and Jackson fans which recalled their understandings and experiences of Michael Jackson's Exeter visit. The second part re-enacted the Jackson speech. This was performed by Sally Burne, Matt Reeves, and Brantley Rogers.

Documentation of this version at the Exeter Phoenix:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKvNmLTIUd0&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=3>

- The second version was shown as a work in progress at a Plymouth Arts Centre residency finissage event, and at the *Poor Copy* Northern Charter exhibition, both in April 2018. This version was in three sections. The first used verbatim recollections of the "Jackson" Barnstaple gig as spoken text, while the actors George Lovesmith and Sara Versi followed and performed a Jackson dance tutorial YouTube video, projected opposite them (with no audio from the video).

Billie Jean Dance Tutorial by Philip Dang of *MJdancetutorial* YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWY2iIoPwIE&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwwqq5-vFSp&index=19> (Dang, 2011, online)

The second section used verbatim recollections of the Jackson in Exeter event as dialogue, while following and performing a Jackson make up tutorial YouTube video, projected opposite them (with no audio from the video).

Michael Jackson make up tutorial by dope2111 on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iG972rPt4I&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=20> (dope2111, 2010, online)

The third section projected a fan-filmed video of the Jackson in Exeter speech which was projected with sound. The actors lip synched to this and re-performed every movement the video showed Jackson performing.

Participant documentation of Jackson's speech at Exeter City Football Club, hosted by YouTube channel Calerami:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpgWEbuU5TY&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=21> (Calerami, 2008, online)

Documentation of a rehearsal of this version at the Northern Charter:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWfdf8rCl8&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=6>

- The third version was shown in the *Poor Copy* Jerwood Visual Arts exhibition. This was a two hour performance in Gallery One of Jerwood, an eleven minute performance script that was repeated throughout the evening's presentation. The actors Sara Versi and Matt Reeves spoke verbatim dialogue of remembrances of the Exeter in Jackson event. Opposite them was projected the Jackson dance tutorial which they followed and performed.

Documentation of a rehearsal of this version at Jerwood Visual Arts:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_Sh66gV0wo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=5

My performance text for *Like A Pantomime* constructed a historiographical narrative drawn from many sources: including Exeter City Football Club archives, oral history interviews with ECFC employees and fans, national newspaper archives and those from the local *Express and*

Echo, Michael Jackson fan testimonies gathered via online fan forums, broadcasts on radio and television, and, finally, blogposts and articles collated on the website of Uri Geller (then-Club chairman).

In this chapter I explore the ethical and political dimensions of engaging with these historical narratives, and with fan historiographies more broadly. The aim is to propose the value of using performance *practice* as a fan studies *research* methodology. I discuss how verbatim theatre might inform understandings of fan engagement: *Like A Pantomime* utilises verbatim theatre processes - a specific kind of performance-making which uses the words of others to create spoken text. Drawing new interviews together with existing documentation, verbatim techniques are a method of making, rather than a theatrical form in-and-of itself.

Building on the work of John Fiske (1993), Will Brooker (2002), and Mark Duffett (2013), who conceive fan archival practices as key to the myth-making of the fan-object, this chapter investigates the ways fan narratives come to be constructed and disseminated in practice. In the case of Michael Jackson fandom specifically, verbatim methods can shed fresh light on how people negotiate their fandom in light of emergent contentious histories that fans may otherwise prefer to forget.

Verbatim carries with it a complex set of ethical issues, engaging as it does with real people. My framing of responses across the two fan communities makes use of what interactive computing academic Amy Bruckman calls ‘moderate disguising’ (2002, online). Within the performance itself, all quotations are anonymized, and sources come from both new oral history interviews and existing unsolicited data. Within the writing, most responses from online conversations have been anonymized, including pseudonyms and other identifying features.

However, where several research conversations and interviews have taken place with the same individual, for example with several of the ECFC fans, I have not anonymized responses; instead, discussing the framing and citation within both performance and writing with them prior to publication. This demonstrates the different working relationships formed with the different fan communities, which is explored further below.

A Pop Star, a Spoon-Bender, and a Football Club

As discussed in the Prologue, the Jackson in Exeter narrative contained strange narrative threads involving (amongst other things) dreams of reincarnated witches, crystals with special powers, and disgraced football directors. My practice-research attempted to untangle these bizarre narrative threads by speaking to the communities present. How do they remember the events unfolding? How did they document them? What were the ECFC and Jackson fan communities' cultural memory of this history? This section first discusses the pragmatics of making *Like A Pantomime*, and further details its different versions. I first conducted and recorded oral history interviews with fans, then transcribed the dialogue. I collated existing fan interviews from newspapers, websites, fan forums and blogs. Working with actors Brantley Rogers, Sally Burne, and Matt Reeves, and later Sara Versi and George Lovesmith, we combined these transcripts with existing fan dialogue to devise a script using experimentation and play.

Like A Pantomime used a similar re-versioning technique as I did with *raremjvideos1*. Each new presentation context gave me reason and opportunity to change the work. The first iteration, performed at Exeter Phoenix in 2016, was in two parts.

Documentation of *Like A Pantomime* at Exeter Phoenix, 2016:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKvNmLTIUd0&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=4&t=1s>

The script of the first section used oral histories of the Jackson at Exeter visit as source material, and the three actors used Jackson dance moves as transitions between the different and distinct voices. The second section was a reenactment of the Jackson speech, with Brantley Rogers as Jackson, Matt Reeves as Matt Fiddes, and Sally Burne as Uri Geller. Brantley delivered the speech to the audience as if they were the ECFC audience; they were urged to hold hands and tell each other that they love one another, as Jackson had to the crowd at St James. This had an additional resonance when performed at Exeter Phoenix, where most of the audience had contextual information about the Jackson visit. Indeed, some of the Phoenix audience had been part of the Jackson at Exeter audience, and some had provided the oral history accounts that were being staged. The willingness (although, as with the original audience, an engagement through embarrassed laughs) to engage with the participatory elements of Jackson's speech, in a site very close to where the originary performance took place, is reminiscent of the folkloric term ostension. Ostension is the enactment, rather than solely the narration, of a folk narrative, urban legend, ghost story or similar (Degh and Vázsonyi, 1983). By re-enacting the Jackson in Exeter speech in an arts space in Exeter, with an audience of whom some had experienced the originary, an 'ostensive play' similar to 'legend tripping' was taking place (Lindahl, 2005, p. 164) - visiting a site in which is a folk story is reputed to originate, and in so doing recirculating and giving credence to that very legend.

The 2018 iterations at Exeter Phoenix and the Northern Charter had expanded to include three parts with two actors, Sara Versi and George Lovesmith.

Documentation of a rehearsal of *Like A Pantomime* at the Northern Charter, 2018:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWfdf8rICl8&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKOW-FLe&index=6>

The spoken script in part one platformed the oral histories of the Barnstaple ‘Michael Jackson’ gig, while the actors followed a Jackson dance tutorial video which was projected silently. Part two’s spoken script was the Jackson in Exeter oral histories, while the actors followed a Jackson make-up youtube tutorial, also projected with no sound. For the third section, no video was projected, but the sound from a fan-recorded video of the Jackson speech found on youtube was played over speakers. The actors lip synced the speech, and also performed each small movement made by Jackson during his original delivery; each thumbs up, each scratch of the chin, each wave that was shown on this fan recorded document.

In its final Jerwood version, *Like A Pantomime* was performed by Sara Versi and Matt Reeves.

Documentation of Documentation of a rehearsal of *Like A Pantomime* at Jerwood Visual Arts, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_Sh66gV0wo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFgoB-5nJL8Hg8EYKoiW-FLe&index=5

This version of the script calls for two actors to deliver around eleven minutes of text narrating Jackson’s Exeter visit. At the same time the performers follow a second physical ‘script’: that of the Jackson Motown 25 dance tutorial, which is projected on the wall in front of them. Here Sara and Matt attempt to learn and perform several iconic Jackson moves, taught by Phillip Dang of the YouTube channel ‘MJdancetutorial’. When both ‘scripts’ end, the actors immediately begin again; each time the dancing becomes a little more polished, the dialogue delivered with a little less energy.



Sara Versi and Matt Reeves performing Like A Pantomime in Gallery One at Jerwood Visual Arts

It is important to note the contexts of contemporary art galleries rather than a purpose-built theatre stage, especially for the final performance at the ‘Poor Copy’ exhibition at Jerwood Visual Arts. At Jerwood, the audience could encounter the work at any point in the piece: it was situated in the first of three connecting gallery spaces in which other artworks (and narrative viewpoints of the event) were installed.³⁸ Similarly to how Lone Twin’s durational performances refigure spectators as ‘invited guests’, audiences were free to come and go as they pleased, to engage with the work either directly or in a ‘relation of non-relation’ (Lavery

³⁸ The other two works are *raremjvideos1*, the videowork which uses youtube documentation of the event as its material, discussed in Chapter Five. *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, the videowork discussed in Chapter Four which platforms the local newspaper The Express and Echo’s narration, using microfilm archives within the Devon Heritage Centre.

2011, p. 8). As a form of cultural memory, the performance made visible ‘the interplay of present and past’ (Erl1 2010, p. 2), platforming the recollections of two fan communities.

Lip sync and mimesis: embodying Jackson, erasing Jackson

The Exeter Phoenix and Northern Charter iterations of the performance made use of lip sync as a method of citation. Drag queen Lypsinka states that:

the joy of lip sync is that you can recapture any point in history that has been recorded for audio and bring it back to life through your own body...it’s simultaneously an archive and a re-presentation. Somewhere between a museum and a live experience (Lypsinka in Smoke, 2019, online).

The performance mode of lip synching draws a lineage from drag, to tribute, to live art. In whatever genre it is platformed, re-performance speaks of the ability to say something new in the present. Artist Dickie Beau uses lip sync to platform personal and cultural queer histories through theatre; re-performing Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, and in *Re-Member Me* (2017), a number of actors who have played Hamlet. A projected video of Beau lip synching remembrances from Richard Eyre, John Wood, Sean Matthias, and Ian McKellen appears over the stage, while on stage Beau arranges and dresses mannequins.

Trailer for *Re-Member Me*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_s9gHYeA8d0&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=22 (Keros, 2017, online)

Beau’s representations of the sheer multiplicities of Hamlet, and of the bodies that temporarily bring him to life, simultaneously platform pretense, presence and absence. Beau states that at the heart of lip synching is making the ‘idea of the person present, but at the same time it’s making present the fact that they’re not there’ (in Kelly, 2017, online). *Re-Member Me* demonstrates lip sync’s ability to muddy linear time in this way; to quote Hamlet ‘the time is out of joint’. Lip sync, when removed from the often-celebratory and exuberant platform of

drag, can have an uncanny, ghostly quality; the lip syncher is at once summoning, embodying and over-writing the original performer, being temporarily possessed by and (mis)using the voice of the originary.

Derrida refers to time being out of joint as a key quality of hauntology. For Derrida this means questioning an authentic temporal past and asserting an ‘always-already absent present’ (Derrida, 1976, xvii). The hauntological effect in Beau’s work and in the third lip synching section of the Northern Charter version of *Like A Pantomime* is reminiscent of a zombie-like reanimation, a ‘(quasi-magical) invocational practice’ (Phelan, 2007, p. 143). Performance theorist Diana Taylor discusses the efficacy of ghosting and repetition as the evocation of traces and present-pasts, bringing memories and grief that belong to other bodies to the fore. The hauntology of re-enactments such as lip synching deals with time in a non-linear fashion, inscribing both the past and present at once. ‘Haunting is historical...but not dated’ (Derrida, 2012, p. 3); it speaks of the past while being in the now. It demonstrates the power within the archive, the ghostly authorial presence that haunts all texts, yet simultaneously the denial of the fixity of meaning within.

Director Trent Harris’ film works *The Beaver Trilogy* has hauntology at its heart. Three separate film works, shot in 1979, 1981, and 1985 construct the trilogy, the first of which is documentary.

The Beaver Trilogy trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaEYXVGHxyU&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqq5-vFSp&index=17>

Titled *The Beaver Kid*, it follows the titular protagonist referred to as ‘Groovin’ Gary’, whom Harris meets in a car park while filming for a Utah news station. Gary performs a number of celebrity impressions. Harris later receives a letter from Gary, inviting him to attend a talent

show organised by Gary, in which he sings the Olivia Newton John song *Please Don't Keep Me Waiting*, while in Newton-John drag. The second installment, *The Beaver Kid 2*, restages the documentary fairly closely, with Sean Penn as 'Groovin' Larry'. Harris is introduced in front of the camera as a key character. The third film (*The Orkly Kid*) shoots Crispin Glover in the Larry role, his stage persona named 'Olivia Neutron Bomb'. This instalment is significantly longer; key additional scenes reflect on Larry's relationships with and position in the small town community, and their reception of his performance, and the director character has more screen time and is seen as a manipulative force in Larry's life.

Both the structural interplay between documentary and semi-fictionalised reenactments, and the subject matter of impersonation and drag, connote haunting and repetition. As the viewer encounters each installment, there is a hall of mirrors effect - Penn re-performs Gary re-performing Olivia Newton-John. By the time we get to Glover's performance, any semblance of an originary has become mired by previous iterations. This circularity is even more complex when we consider that the first film is positioned as 'documentary', yet the director character problematizes the concept of documentary reality by exposing directorial power and authorship.

This creative device helps to make explicit some of the themes in the initial work; the relationship between filmmaker and subject, the blurred line between fame and shame, and the tension between self-expression and conservative conformity (Scott, 2000, online). The director's engagements with the Larry character makes the viewer question whether Harris' framing of Gary/Larry is a celebration of amateur entertainment performed with gusto and charm, or a patronizing and snobbish exploitation of small-town characters. In interviews, Harris has responded that despite the critical framing of the director character, in actuality it

was he who was manipulated by Gary; stating that Gary's aim to be on television would help 'legitimise' his act (Harris in Bradford, 2009, online). My reading is less polarised; as each instalment unpacks more about the 'director' and Gary/Larry's motivations, the work becomes more complex, both more tragic and comic. However, as a documentary made by Brad Besser, *The Beaver Trilogy Part IV* (2015) narrates, Gary did actually shoot himself after the release of the films. Thankfully he survived, but knowing this additional context cannot help but change the viewers' engagement with the trilogy. It is unclear to what extent the films influenced this action, but it could be read as extremely damning of Harris. Suddenly the narrative leap in parts two and three which more explicitly defines Gary/Larry as gay, seems less like a comment on the emotional challenges faced by closeted young people in the United States, and more like a non-consensual outing. As each iteration of Gary/Larry's Newton-John performance is filmed, the desperation and pain within his drag act is heightened. This repetition of painful experiences embodies what Mark Fisher describes as a key direction within hauntology:

that which is (in actuality is) no longer, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic "compulsion to repeat," a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern). (Fisher, 2012, p.19)

Harris' work platforms Gary/Larry's re-performances as a compulsive repetition that is both fascinating and painful to watch. The use of parody within the work adds a further iterative layer which appears to be neither wholly celebratory or condemning.

When the 'real' Gary performs, there are few signs of irony in his portrayal of 'Olivia Newton Don'. His sincerity reads to me as charming and enthusiastic rather than ridiculous. As Penn and then Glover re-enact Gary as Larry, parody is introduced. Penn's Gary/Larry is reverential, it is clear he has made a close study, somehow becoming more Gary than Gary himself. As Linda Hutcheon states, parody 'legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies' (2002, p. 91).

Penn both ‘legitimizes’ Gary *and* positions him as a comic figure, adding further complexity to his portrayal(s).

Within the Northern Charter and Exeter Phoenix 2018 performances of *Like A Pantomime*, a similar close mimesis occurs in the third section where the actors lip sync to Jackson’s speech. The effect is similar to that of Penn’s embodiment of Gary; Jackson is both subverted and affirmed. The lip sync element, however, introduces a level of uncanniness that on reflection, was jarring. Isolating only the micro-gestures of Jackson delivering the speech gleaned from the fan video made the Jackson re-performance by Sara and George stilted, strange, and unnerving - even monstrous. While this is a descriptor that many have labelled Jackson, the performances felt too caricaturing to be kept in the performance version at Jerwood. It also felt tautological, as the speech was platformed in the *raremjvideos1* work in the third gallery space. By removing the speech section from *Like A Pantomime*, the viewer was left to come to the crux of the narrative (the speech text delivered by Jackson) in the final space that they could navigate to, after they had heard the fan and mediated historiographies of the event; there was a narrative journey in the curating within the galleries. In fact, despite my personal belief that Jackson probably was guilty, there was still a part of me that withheld from presenting him as a monster. I felt a responsibility to his fans (which is discussed in more detail below) to not characterise someone who may have been extremely mentally ill as a ‘weird’ figure to mock. This isn’t solely a thinking through of the ‘responsibility’ of the artist towards its subjects, but a ‘response-ability’. As Rebecca Schneider articulates, this is the relational which ‘reinaugurates possibilities or potentialities for response’ (2017, p.116). It is not about fixing a reading of the material down for myself as maker, for the actors as reenactors, or for the audiences, but an attempt to highlight the complexities, gaps in understanding, and dualities in play:

Even as history can be interrupted at a standstill in the intervals among call and response, that pause—in the break or in the wake—is where our relations re-sound, recycle, and potentially relocate. Recycling...is both reiteration and movement. Repetition and revision. Both/and. (Schneider, 2017, p. 117)

My decision to edit out the lip sync section from the final presentation of *Like A Pantomime* demonstrates the line between a repetitious act embracing the producerly qualities of a mythic text, and a too-close mimesis - one which does not offer up a 'revision' in the again-time of repetition. The lip sync section felt closed down, narratively and aesthetically. By choosing to show only the section with the Jackson in Exeter oral history recollections at Jerwood within *Like A Pantomime* at Jerwood Visual Arts, I highlighted the two different fan communities' understanding of him and his visit to St James Park, rather than making a statement about Jackson himself. The fan communities, and the audiences of the *Poor Copy* exhibition, were free to respond to Jackson in their own way.

As *Poor Copy* reflects on multiple iterations and mediations of Jackson - via tribute, fan historiographies, and fan and non-fan archival documents - so *The Beaver Trilogy* has a similar mimetic quality. With Newton-John as the originary, *The Beaver Trilogy* inhabits several additional iterations in a re-versioning process, as well as spawning the documentary *The Beaver Trilogy Part IV*, and an artwork which reworks the reperforming of *Please Don't Keep Me Waiting: Bliss and Heaven* (2004) by Jesper Just.

Bliss and Heaven by Jesper Just:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CA5O1ej0YBQ&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwq qq5-vFSp&index=18>

Just makes video works which explore gender roles and performances of emotion via Hollywood tropes. In this work, a man walks through a wheat field, before seeing a large truck pull up and stop. The driver climbs into the back of the truck, the first man follows, finding

himself not in a truck but rather an auditorium. He watches as the driver performs *Please Don't Keep Me Waiting* while in drag reminiscent of Groovin' Gary. When the song finishes, the driver collapses, while the man applauds.

As we see how Newton-John and Jackson are reinterpreted ad infinitum, we can read their star text mutating and spreading. They are examples of hyper-producerly texts; Jackson narratives in particular embodies the notion of an ambiguous unfixed text which invites productive reinterpretations. His histories' many readings beget many many responses, causing these interpretations to be circulated in an almost-viral way. In *If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead (Part Six): Spreadable Content* (2009), Henry Jenkins draws parallels between media content circulation and oral rumours. By circulating a narrative, rumours help bond community-members - affirming their commonality and drawing lines between friend and foe. Citing Professor of African-American and African Studies Patricia A Turner, Jenkins sums up the factors that motivate sharing texts as:

1. To bolster camaraderie and articulate the (presumably shared) experiences and values that identify oneself as belong to a particular community ("bolstering their identity")
2. To gather information and explain difficult to understand events or circumstances.
3. To establish the boundaries of an "in-group". (Turner in Jenkins, 2009, online)

The fan communities I spoke with seemed to be engaging with all three motivations while narrating the Jackson events. The same could be said for Groovin' Gary; performing Newton-John's persona to try to gain community friendship, and understanding his position with that community, as Harris draws out in the second and third installments, his sexuality and identity in a heteronormative and conservative small-town. For Harris, Just, and me, as participant-observers, the text or rumour we are 'spreading' is not to ingratiate ourselves within that community, but to understand how the narratives work, and to try to understand the shared text itself. What Gary, the tribute artists in my Jackson narratives, Harris, and myself are all doing, is transforming a mass media text into a popular culture text. In *Understanding Popular*

Culture, John Fiske argues that the act of turning mass media into popular culture involves ‘the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures’ (Fiske, 1989, p.23). For example, if we hear a song on the radio, it is a part of mass culture. If we sing it in the shower, it is a part of popular culture. The difference is wresting control from its producers, to the consumers.

As an artist, I am both producer and consumer. As Hutcheon describes, postmodern creative production does not deny its implication in capitalist modes of production (as with mass media texts), because it knows it cannot. As Harris does, questioning the position of maker as participant-observer exploits the ‘insider’ position to begin a subversion from within (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 114). Parody de-doxifies, politicising representation and highlighting the ways that interpretation is ideological (Felluga, 2011, online).

Verbatim: “real” words, “real” stories?

Like A Pantomime makes use of verbatim modes of making, and explores one of its key debates: namely, to what extent can verbatim practices be considered ‘documentary’ or historically ‘authentic’? The method of using text material from newly-transcribed interviews or existing records to create performance dialogue is the defining characteristic of verbatim theatre (Paget, 1987; Hammond, 2008). Using ‘real words’ can indicate to audiences that the narratives are “‘real” stories’ - the performance can be approached not just as a play but as an ‘accurate source of information’ (Hammond, 2008, unpaginated). Performance and disabilities studies scholar Janet Gibson’s summary of verbatim practices demonstrates its varied nomenclature across the field of western theatre: verbatim is the preferred term in the UK and Australia, in the United States it is called ‘documentary theater’, while it has also been referenced as ‘the theater of testimony’ and ‘staged oral history’ (2011, p. 3). These terms all

place interviews with people at the centre of the making process, and some more than others explicitly infer a claim to ‘truth’. However, the contrivances required to keep to a rigid methodological approach can highlight its very ‘inauthentic’ construction, as theatre critic Alice Saville discusses in an article on the ethics of verbatim play *London Road*. Its director and writer told the audience of a post-screening discussion their experience of a long journey late in the production process, solely to tape the character Julie (or the real woman whose words she speaks) saying just two words: ‘Come in’, in order to make narrative sense of a scene that they were working on. The anecdote was meant to demonstrate the ‘obsessively meticulous process and loving devotion to the “truth”’, but Saville felt it did the opposite - demonstrating how fabricated the piece was, as opposed to using people’s stories to give the play its ‘reality’ (Saville, 2015, online).

Theatre studies, audience studies, and fan studies have been conducting similar debates which problematize testimonials and researcher subjectivity. Within audience studies, Kirsty Sedgman (2019) and Ien Ang (2006) have urged researchers to resist claims of objectivity, and to recognize that the ‘truth’ in which the researcher is engaged in is that of the ‘construction of interpretations’ (Ang, 2006, p. 38). Similarly, within fan studies, Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi have highlighted ‘researcher reflexivity’ as a key response to the response to the ‘crisis of representation’ within the field (2014, p.14); reflexivity and interpretation highlight the hierarchies and subjectivities at play within the research enquiry. Setting aside unrealistic notions of objectivity can tease out these relations, underscoring the politics of interpretation for research subjects, audiences, and researchers.

As an artist-researcher who collaborates with people from outside of the arts community, I am often thinking through the politics, ethics, and boundaries between participation, collaboration,

and co-authorship. These considerations are integral to fan studies discourse; Ruth A. Deller summarises these as not merely being a case of positioning ourselves as ‘aca-fans’ or ‘not-fans’, a participant or observer to that community, but being transparent about our own position in relation to our research subjects, and about how our identity markers can shape both our and our participants’ relationships to fandom, to research, and to one another (2018, p. 12).

The two communities I worked with are both fan communities; within fan studies the prominent ‘fans first’ perspective ensures that fan privacy and agency are always put first. However, while respect is obviously paramount in verbatim methodologies, we must recognise that fan subjects (indeed any oral history interviewee) do not always (if ever) constitute ‘reliable witnesses’, let alone ‘objective historical characters’. This doesn’t weaken the position of verbatim performance works as a way to engage audiences with fan histories, but instead unpacks the way that historical narratives and cultural memory are constructed by those communities.

Like A Pantomime: Capturing and Performing Fan Historiographies

Cultural memory was already on the agenda of ECFC Supporters’ Trust, who since 2008 had engaged in a number of fan historiography projects.³⁹ While cultural memory is a multifarious term, a broad definition as posited by memory studies scholar Astrid Erll is ‘the interplay of present and past in sociocultural contexts’ (2010, p. 2). This section considers the implications of representing fans’ cultural memories through a practice-as-research project, working toward the production of a verbatim performance rather than a written history.

³⁹ This project owes a debt of gratitude to their resident digital archivist William Barrett, based in the Digital Heritage department at the University of Exeter, for connecting me to fans with whom I conducted oral history interviews.

The defining characteristic of verbatim theatre is the use of text material from newly-transcribed interviews or existing records to create performance dialogue (Paget, 1987; Hammond, 2008). This method of performance-making places research participants at the centre of the process, which in my project captured discursive data in three primary ways:

1. Collating existing fan narratives from fan message boards and contacting authors online for permission. While these are ‘public’ sites, their intended audience is fellow Jackson fans – hence, as an outsider to that fan community, adhering to contextual integrity required seeking informed consent.⁴⁰
2. Beginning new message threads on fan sites and engaging in online discussions, with the clearly stated purpose that it is for my practice-research in the public domain (and with my ‘outsider’ status clearly signposted).
3. Using fan statements already on public record: for example, fan commentary cited in newspaper articles documenting the event. It was assumed that these quotes from journalistic sources had already gone through the necessary approval process.
4. Conducting new oral history interviews with fans.⁴¹

This combination of methods was essentially historiographic: aiming to capture the complexity of cultural memory as itself a composition, made up of individual (often conflicting) acts of

⁴⁰ For more on contextual integrity see Nissenbaum (2004). It can be difficult to contact a fan author as online journals are abandoned and usernames change. In the few instances where this was the case, I have felt safe to quote text as it appears in archives, given that, as Whiteman states, these comments are already disconnected from the fans upon whom they reflect (2012, p. 252)

⁴¹ Oral history interviews are a technique that some existing fan studies scholarship has employed: Abigail De Kosnik interviewed media fans telling their fandom history in their own words for the *Fan Fiction Oral History Project* (2012); Andrea Horbinski has drawn on oral histories to analyse women’s participation in internet spaces in the 1990s (2018); Stephen Kelly interviewed different football fan communities in Liverpool and Manchester, UK (2009). Fandoms are also undertaking their own oral history projects: the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW)’ *Media Fandom Oral History Project* (Dawn, Dickson, and OTW 2012 – present); the OTWs’ *The Vidding History Project* (dates unknown); and the J.R.R. Tolkien Fandom Oral History Collection (Fliss 2019-present).

recollection, misremembering, and forgetting. To offer just one example: in advance of the Jerwood exhibition I contacted an oral history interviewee – Martin Weiler, chair of the Supporters’ Trust – to check he was happy with my new shorter edit of his responses. This was the third time he had reviewed his recollections – yet only now did he realise he had made a mistake. He originally stated that although the Jackson event ‘typified the strangeness of the period of the club’ during that time, a ‘real good’ came from it: namely, that the ‘supporters took over the club, and at the time we were the first and only club to be owned by the fans’. Two-and-a-half years and three reviews after the initial interview, Martin spotted his error – and laughed. ECFC certainly weren’t the first fan-owned club, he said, so he had probably got ‘carried away’. After some discussion we decided to retain the original dialogue, as a record of his remembrance, rather than an impossible attempt to recount the narrative in its historical totality.

This anecdote exemplifies the epistemological heart of this practice-research, which understands memories as subjective – and highly selective – reconstructions of past events. Versions of the past change with every recall, and so individual and collective memories are not a mirror image of the past, but rather an ‘expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present’ (Erll, 2016, p. 8). In this way, a feedback loop of memory-making is established between mediated historical narratives, their re-membering and re-telling, and their various iterations.

It is my contention that verbatim performance is peculiarly able to fracture the seeming cohesiveness of cultural memory into its disparate discursive elements. Using the Jackson-in-Exeter event as my starting point, *Like A Pantomime* staged a performance of fans’ memories, thereby blurring the authorship of the narrative and highlighting the ‘messiness’ of cultural

memory: the chronology is not strictly linear; the script meanders and contradicts itself, as did the accounts in the oral histories and other narratives themselves. In the Jerwood version, by repeating the eleven-minute script on loop for two hours, the performance exposed the chain of iterations in history, memory, and myth-making.

But verbatim theatre also produces a particular pressure to handle fans' responses with care. Designed for a wider audience than academia alone, verbatim performances can potentially shine a light on history by giving a public platform to under-told stories. Furthermore, by transforming research material into a performance script, practitioners create new readings of the dialogue to which interviewees should have the 'right to reply'. In *Like a Pantomime*, fans not only offered their testimonials but were actively involved throughout the process as a whole. Ethical steps taken included:

1. Providing an informed consent sheet;
2. Offering oral history interviewees the right to withdraw or edit their comments;
3. Inviting them to scratch performances for feedback;
4. Giving them the final script for approval;
5. Citing their contributions in accompanying exhibition text.

Above all, this required me to approach collaborations not as an artist or a researcher first, but as someone interested in – and who values – fans' stories, which were approached from a position of respect and fan-positivity (Duffett 2013, p. 275). Yet the project also demonstrated the challenges for fans of negotiating problematic narratives. The following section explores the difficulty as a researcher of negotiating these tensions.

Jackson Fandom and ‘Non-Canonical’ Narratives

While a cluster of fans on online Jackson fan forums felt the project offered the chance to share their encounter with Jackson himself – still a cherished memory fifteen years after the event – others were more reticent to engage. The reason for hesitancy was, I believe, twofold: first, media’s tendency to ‘pathologise’ (Jenson, 1992) Jackson fans as ‘irrational’ or ‘crazy’, ‘blindly loyal’ or ‘emotivist’ (Hills, 2007); second, the allegations against Jackson of child sex abuse. My project wanted to avoid the negative stereotyping typified by representation such as the *Wacko About Jacko* (Leveugle, 2005) television documentary, with certain fans featured not entirely pleased with either their or Jackson’s representation, stating that they would not have taken part had they known it wasn’t wholly ‘positive’ (Hills, 2005, p. 459).

Wacko About Jacko documentary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GnCOM9Bslg&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwwqq5-vFSp&index=25>

Here there was a gap between fan expectations and the finished product, which indicated a lack of transparency in the documentary production process.

In contrast, my research followed in the footsteps of fan scholars’ calls for self-reflexivity, aiming for transparency in how our own subject positions and identity markers might shape our/our participants’ relationships – to fandom, to research, and to one another (Deller 2018, p. 12). It was therefore important to make visible my feminist subjectivity during this project, in which Jackson allegations were referenced by many of the fans I approached for interview. My position is to believe ‘accusers’⁴² in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, and so I made clear my decision not to pay false lip service to Jackson even if it meant that some fans chose not to engage with the research.

⁴² An admittedly uncomfortable term in and of itself, as it implies innocence on the part of the person accused.

In one notable example, a tribute artist and Jackson fan who auditioned to be in *Like A Pantomime*, and whom I subsequently invited to run a workshop with the performers, decided to withdraw from the project when it became apparent that it was not sufficiently ‘honouring’ Jackson. They cited a number of concerns about both the performance itself and the other artworks forming under the ‘Poor Copy’ project umbrella. The first concern was that the project was not doing enough to refute the allegations, or to ‘properly commemorate’ Jackson’s life and work. The second, related concern was that another tribute artist had previously appeared in a videowork which implied that Jackson was guilty; they were subsequently shunned by the Jackson tribute-artist community.

Would the tribute artist have so readily withdrawn from the process if the findings were solely shared in a written output? I think that part of his reticence was in the ‘not-knowing’ of the creative process of making practice-research, as well as the wider audience for practice-research shown within galleries to the public rather than solely within academia. My versioned devising process with the verbatim performance was porous, but possibly too malleable to be able to give this potential collaborator the definitive detail that he felt he needed to be able to engage with it. We can’t always define exactly where a research enquiry will be going at the beginning of any project, but with practice-research, the outcomes can seem more nebulous – particularly if working as an interdisciplinary artist where the content, context, and collaborators of work help shape the outcome. While I believe this flexible approach actually helps strengthen engagement, it could also be seen by some respondents to be too open and unfixed.

The aim of my Jackson-in-Exeter investigation was to understand how different fan communities create and disseminate archives, rather than to produce a celebration or critique

of Jackson (either on artistic or ethical grounds). The decision of this person to withdraw nonetheless was indicative of the concerns of many Jackson fans: that is, the feeling that they should not engage and tell their side of the story for fear that the project outcomes would not be sufficiently ‘complimentary’.⁴³ This can be linked to Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett’s (2008) analysis of the ‘advocacy agenda’ in cultural industries research: a perceived need to restrict findings to solely positive outcomes which excludes the possibility of open-ended analysis.⁴⁴ While Belfiore and Bennett position this advocacy agenda within the cultural industries, where organisations may only engage with research projects which have an interest in the promotion of the arts (2008, p. 8), it is possible that fans may participate with fan studies research similarly: contributing only if the research promotes the fandom or the fan object. Here the fandom can be seen to reject the ‘non-canonical’ reading of Jackson as abuser.

Within the ‘fans first’ (Busse and Hellekson, 2012) ethos of contemporary fan studies, respect for privacy and consent is key. However, this approach can also serve as an ‘injunction’ to engaging with members of fan communities who may not be able to be our ‘fan friends’ (Natasha Whiteman 2012, p.310-11). While I needed to be respectful of fans’ desire to defend Jackson, I could not dismiss my own ethical position, nor ignore my cultural capital as artist-researcher who is neither Exeter City Football nor Jackson fan. These are communities in which I am a guest; to return to Deller, the importance of self-reflexivity meant I must clearly position myself as such (2018, p. 12). Avoiding positioning fans as a ‘colonised’ research

⁴³ While I am hesitant to make generalizations of the entire fan community, the following anecdote is indicative of this position. I last logged on to a particular Jackson fan forum in April 2019 to ask a member if they were happy with a new context in which I wanted to cite them. If you do not select a member profile image then you are assigned the default – which was an image of Jackson’s face with a large ‘innocent’ sign over his mouth. It turned out that I had been an unwilling Jackson defender via my forum avatar.

⁴⁴ Perhaps revealingly, while it wasn’t difficult to find grassroots fans to interview, most of the club officials in managerial positions did not want to participate in the project. It is possible that, for some, this is because that particular moment in time represented a PR low point in the club’s history: a moment that has since been called ‘the circus years’.

subject (Whiteman, 2016, p. 311) or engaging them in a ‘parasitic’ relationship (Burton and Tam, 2015, p. 2) from the outsider perspective of a non-fan necessitated ongoing conversations about fans’ agency within the research – a requirement which has potential to paralyse the researcher into completely disengaging from those communities. In this case, as the majority of Jackson fans saw my refusal to state Jackson’s freedom from guilt as a barrier to engagement, far more of the Jackson fan dialogue came from pre-existing mediated remembrances.

There is an ethical paradox here. While I was critical of the Jackson fan community’s silencing of narratives of trauma, I myself was essentially erasing from my performance those fans’ voices who denied the allegations. As anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot states, ‘[t]he census taker is always a *censor*—and not only because of a lucky play of etymology: he who counts heads always silences facts and voices’ (2015, p. 51).

There were thus (sometimes conflicting) layers of responsibility within the research project of which I needed to be mindful: responsibility towards ‘the authentic voices of fans themselves [which] are rarely heard’ (Harris, 1998, p.5), their feelings and privacy; towards the accusers and their lived experiences of trauma; towards my position as feminist artist-researcher; and – despite problematizing the notion of historical objective truth – a responsibility towards knowledge itself. This complex research navigation is similar to Bethan Jones’ (2016, 2018) research into fans of the rock band Lostprophets after the band’s lead singer was convicted of child sexual abuse. Jones emphasizes the importance of listening to fans without judgment, but notes that this does not mean we necessarily approve of everything they say.

This is where socially-engaged art and live performance practices have the ability to make a significant fan studies intervention. Art historian Claire Bishop argues that successful artworks should be judged not on whether a utopian ideal of ‘consensus’ has been reached, but whether the piece has highlighted the social and political realities of the context in which the work was made (Bishop, 2004, p.70). The aim is ‘agonism’: a relationship where ‘conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents’ (Mouffe 2005, p. 135). Verbatim performance can put these conflicts centre-stage, offering a richer ‘witnessing experience’ (Young in Bartlett, 2011, p. 181) by implicating artists, interviewees, and audiences in the ethical matrix of performance.

Unlike written fan studies scholarship, or even moving-image practice-research outputs, there is an immediate inter-personal engagement between audience and actors that brings up the notion of ‘response-ability’, discussed above. This posits that in the act of responding to something we take responsibility for it, helping us reconsider our relationship between what we see in the theatre or gallery space, and what we see and how we engage with those things in the world (Duggan, 2013, p. 156). When dealing with a history of a celebrity who is the subject of repeated, public allegations of paedophilia, this ‘potency’ and our (often uncomfortable) responses to it can therefore be brought to the fore.

Despite the absence of critical Jackson fan voices, and the absence of the allegations in the performance text, the unspoken alleged trauma was very much present in the accounts in the performance. The dialogue was weighted down with implicit meaning. Trauma has been defined as that which is uncommunicable, opaque, and unknowable; resisting comprehension (Fisher, 2011, p. 112), so perhaps it is unsurprising that for many (including but not limited to

Jackson's fans) it can be difficult to grapple with these allegations. While it wasn't appropriate or relevant within the dialogue of the performance to explore the accusations towards Jackson, the horror of the negative aspects of Jackson's star text haunted the dialogue:

When I called Michael and said to him would he like to come to Exeter City Football Club he said: "Are there going to be children from hospitals there?" and I said "Yes". His first words were "See it as done".

The intertextuality of the Jackson narrative, within and without the fandom, demonstrates that the ultimate mark of power within historical narratives may be invisibility (Trouillot, 2015).

Conclusion

Verbatim is an iterative mode that places cultural memory at its centre. It demonstrates the cyclical nature of memory within fan communities, and their relationships to documentary fragments: a lemniscate of tellings and retellings. Cultural memory studies scholars cite this dissolving of the history/memory binary as one of its key strengths (Erll, 2006; Olick, 2010); instead favouring analysis of the different modes of remembering, proceeding from the basic premise that the past is not given, but is instead continually re-constructed and re-presented. The making and performance of *Like A Pantomime* aimed to show how two fan communities do this; seen in this way 'history is yet another mode of cultural memory, and historiography its specific medium' (Erll, 2010, p. 7).

If audiences' individual revelations, distortions, and evasions act similarly to archives themselves, providing only one of innumerable 'ways in' to history, then using verbatim performances to juxtapose a multiplicity of voices is to highlight the idea that the logic of history is not one of discovery but of construction, and thereby to question mono-dimensional claims to truth (Munslow in Jenkins, 2003, p. xiii). By using verbatim methods, *Like A Pantomime* simultaneously represented historical "fact" and historical "fiction" as a

performance: as creative invention. Moving between historiographic binaries of ‘naive positivism and utopian deconstructivism’ (Burton, 2006, p. 21) allowed me as maker to engage both with the material itself and with the material’s authors, caretakers, and gatekeepers in an ‘interpretively responsible method of critical engagement with the past’ (Burton, 2006, p. 21). Methodologically, then, verbatim adds a useful tool to the fan studies toolkit: one that mirrors fannish modes of making (fanfic, fan art) by destabilising the canonicity of a narrative, ‘re-telling’ it through the lens of varying subjectivities.

While practice-research is gaining ground within fan studies as a methodological approach (see Cassie Yishu Lin’s doctoral work on *Performing the Slash: a Visualisation on the Process of Women Writing Slash Fiction* (2017) via documentary moving image, and Owen G Parry’s postdoctoral work on *Anti-Fans and Amateur Experts* via live art and installation (2018-19)), verbatim offers something specific. It not only platforms fan voices but can engage them in the construction and analysis of how their words are presented; via sharings during the devising process, at scratch performances, by sharing documentation of work in progress. This re-versioning creation process is similar to how fanfic authors may release longer fanfic works in chapters or revised texts/multiple drafts, receiving notes and feedback from readers as new edits or new sections are uploaded to platforms such as Archive Of Our Own. *Like A Pantomime*’s verbatim methodology acts as an embodied fanfic of the cultural memory of the fan communities; simultaneously subverting and affirming the fan communities’ historical narratives. Verbatim highlights the critical and creative potential within chains of repetition; reproductions that are fannishly transformative. Verbatim is citational of fan communities, literally, creatively, and iteratively.

For both myself as practitioner-researcher, and for the work's audiences, even through the silencing of trauma in the archives I engaged with, the ghost of the allegations against Jackson confronts us. In a post- *Leaving Neverland* climate, I'm not sure I'd stage *Like A Pantomime* again; the weight of the now-published details of abuse hangs too heavy. As historian Antoinette Burton (2006, pp. 7-8) states, history is not a project of 'fact-retrieval...but a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention - processes set in motion by, among other things, one's personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one's reading of what is to be found there'. Even when, or perhaps especially when, engaging with histories which are contentious, it is important to create spaces which encourage 'active remembering'; projects that involve people in experiencing what it means to remember, and what to do with memories that make them active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection (Frisch in Ramirez, 2006, pp. 117-118). Verbatim can give us this space, and can enable us to see our own complicity and agency within it.

CONCLUSION

This thesis asks how art-making processes and products can foster, embrace, and represent activities that empower participants to create, change, or build on dominant histories and mythologies. Through practice-research I have demonstrated that artworks that engage with producerly *texts* reveal the unfixed potentialities of historical narratives, while artworks which employ producerly *practices* are both the cause and effect of how mythic histories are constructed and spread. Producerly practices are inherently iterative, offering opportunities for the sharing, discussion, and repetition of artworks with and by communities, allowing for changes in (and critical reflection of) narrative-construction. When working with archival fragments, cultural memories, and community historiographies, understandings and perspectives of the past will vary. I propose several discursive strategies of art-making to platform a multiplicity of voices in artworks which engage with the past: re-versioning, verbatim, and agonism. These dialogic methods recognise that ethics are at the fore of research projects which speak of contentious histories, but acknowledges that an ethical approach does not necessarily mean a neutral one. An agonist methodology in particular respects and gives voice not only to community members, but also to the subjectivity of the practice-researcher: by platforming often-conflicting retellings, the artwork deconstructs the idea of an objective historical narrative.

I expand on my findings in this conclusion. I hope that the findings will be useful for those who make or analyse artworks which engage with communities and difficult or disputed histories. In ‘Interdisciplinary exchanges, producerly practices’, I unpack how producerly texts have previously been understood through a fan and media studies frame, I then extend its use to producerly practices across fan, performance, and contemporary art ecologies. I position producerly practices as pop culture myth-making methods; they are one way in which fan

communities remember, mythologise, and retell histories. There is a two-way methodological ‘borrowing’ at play in *Poor Copy*: appropriating a performance studies and fine art practice-research method to fan studies, and appropriating fan methods of creative practice within a performance studies and fine art research frame. This appropriative methodology is *appropriate*, given that repetition, again-ness, and cross-disciplinarity is so central to this research project.

At the heart of *Poor Copy* is a celebration of agency and creativity in ‘again-ness’, as a way to add to and build on narrative feedback loops of production-selection-distribution-production. In ‘Audiences, Archives, Accessibility’ I discuss the re-versioning process which mirrors fannish iterative methods of making, and which also allows the artist to consider different exhibition platforms for different audiences. I explain my final presentation choice for the practice-research outcomes as a meta-archive on the YouTube platform, and consider how intertextual changes to the artwork can be navigated. In particular I discuss the *Leaving Neverland* documentation and its impact on the exhibition choices I have made.

Finally, in ‘Communities, Contentious Histories, Discursive Strategies’ I evaluate my subjectivity as an artist-researcher while working with communities of interest, whose histories are not my own. I discuss strategies for ethical practice-research engagements with communities that one may be a visitor to, whilst being clear that the project is not an ethnographic study of specific fan communities, rather using those fan communities as a case study to investigate community historiographic practices, fan creative practices, and the links and overlaps between the two.

INTERDISCIPLINARY EXCHANGES, PRODUCERLY PRACTICES

For an academic audience, the *Poor Copy* thesis is inherently interdisciplinary. While the research project contributes new knowledge around methodological interdisciplinarity to performance, visual art, and fan studies, it also builds on thinking in other fields such as folklore studies, reenactment studies, and socially engaged practice. I utilise and extend re-enactment studies' investigations into the critical potential in repetition; apply folkloric understandings of ostension to site-specific art; and use a social practice framing of agonism within verbatim performances. There is also an engagement with cultural memory studies; I demonstrate how fanac producerly methods of making can be applied to historical narratives (rather than solely fictive stories) within a performance and visual art mode, playing with the notion of historical as well as fictive 'canons' to say something new, subvert an existing narrative, and insert the subjective. While I apply methods of fan creative practice to performance and contemporary visual art production, I conversely relate a performance and visual arts practice-research methodological approach to a fan studies area of enquiry. I demonstrate the creative and critical strengths of producerly practices across fan, performance, and visual arts spheres of production and dissemination, and argue for a non-hierarchical reception of these works.

Theatre and performance and fine art practice-research methodologies can be hugely beneficial to fan and media studies. As fan studies scholars Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi state, discussion around methodology in the field has been 'thin on the ground' (2014, online). Matt Hills calls for (and practices) fan-based autoethnographies in order to avoid the position of a singular text and respond to fandom's intertextuality (2002), and Evans and Stasi builds on this to suggest that digital ethnographic methods can be used in tandem with autoethnography to offer a close and self-reflexive examination of fan cultures. They also state that they:

see opportunities to develop fan studies research into more embodied accounts that deal not only with the discursive practices of fandom (e.g. the constructs and constraints of

identity), but with what it means when people actually take up these discursive practices and really live through them (2014, online).

By specifying a demand for a ‘more embodied account’ they are almost (but not explicitly) invoking a method of ‘doing’, of performance practice-research. The form of performance-as-research prominently underlines the malleability inherent in all texts; the dual position of practice-research performance as both knowledge-communicative and as a producerly text open to interpretation.

Practice-research recognises that ‘if we are to understand the role, processes and function of cultural practice more generally, it is important to be able to explore through doing’ (Sjoberg and Hughes, 2019, online). Transformational fandom is based upon fanworks (Fanlore, 2016, online); to understand these fan creative practices (and therefore fandoms), actually *doing* them is imperative. Practice-researchers can analyse practice in a more direct and intimate way; ‘observing and analysing themselves as they engage in the act of creation, rather than relying solely on dissection of the art after the fact’ (Lyle Skains, 2018, p.84).

Therefore, this thesis positions fan methods of making as both research subject *and* research method, to investigate methodological similarities between fan and contemporary art practices. It is through practice-research that I have understood that what links fan and contemporary art methods of engaging with extant narratives is a critical and creative iterative approach, which I term ‘producerly practices’. Producerly practices can be seen in fan practices such as fanvidding, fanfic, and zine making, and in contemporary art practices that have been broadly grouped as ‘postproduction art’. While producerly practices mirror and include transformative fan practices, not all transformative fan works are producerly. What is integral to Fiske’s conception of producerly texts, and my positioning of producerly practices, is an open and

interpretative narrative which resists singular readings, and potentially has gaps, irresolutions, and at times contradictions. I used the Jackson in Exeter histories as case study to demonstrate that producerly texts (here, narratives of Jackson and his performances) beget producerly practices (here, fan commemorations and my practice-research artworks). In turn, producerly practices create producerly texts, which are similarly open and malleable in their reading and reception, and often will invite future interpretations. Producerly practices demonstrate the agency of the contexts of the extant narrative, the artist and her subjectivity, and the almost infinite subjectivities and readings of the varying audiences.

Producerly practices embody Deleuze's ideas of simulacra. While Baudrillard's (1983) theory of simulacra can be read as a lament for the 'real' that has been lost in the virtual world of simulation, Deleuze argues that simulacra, being more than 'simple imitation', can utilize their iterative nature to challenge or even overturn an accepted ideal or 'privileged position' (1968, p. 69). Deleuze defines simulacra as 'those systems in which different relates to different by means of difference itself' (1968, p. 299). There are emancipatory possibilities of simulacra, to deconstruct, analyse, and subvert that which it reproduces: producerly practices as simulacra have the ability to challenge dominant historical narratives. Deleuze uses his theory of simulacrum to argue against the idea of an essential real or originating point: 'there is only the continual, and creative, production of the real, which is summed up in the maxim "everything is production"' (Edward, 2008, online). Producerly practices can be said to use Deleuze's more liberating and critical form of simulacra to encourage a diversity of voices and ideas within creative iterative practices. Therefore, producerly art practices add to the canon and mythos of the cultural product of which one is a fan. A fannish approach to archival material recognises its producerly qualities: its malleability and creative potential, instead of seeing historical documents as static and 'past'. The practice-research artworks *Yes, It Really Happened* and *No*

Such Event Took Place, which make use of fannish modes of making, demonstrates how archival materials might exist outside of this binary of past-future: the iterative and producerly potential of archival material encourages creative again-ness.

Producerly practices by both fan and contemporary art practitioners present a more overtly material and embodied re-thinking present in creative and critical iterative modes of making. Returning to Bourriaud's understanding of postproduction, a producerly production loop can show how art can 'bring[s] collective scenarios to consciousness and offer[s] us other pathways through reality, with the help of forms themselves, which make these imposed narratives material' (2002, p. 40). As reception studies scholar Ika Willis states in the Afterword to *Fandom As Methodology*, 'in shipping or slashing art practice and fandom, it demonstrates the similarities, the shared ground between the two (if we can any longer think of them as "two")' (2019, p. 215). What separates fan art and contemporary art is (perhaps solely) their spheres of production and dissemination.

This elision may, however, render invisible some boundaries between practices that we do not wish to hide. As Willis states, the cultural capital of artists showing work in institutional art spaces is very different to the fan art created by teens sharing work online. It is often the work of the young, the queer and/or the female that is overlooked (Willis, 2019, pp. 216-17). This division can be seen in the authorship of the celebrated contemporary artists that I cite in this thesis (largely white, British, and cis-male), and the fanworks (who are made by female, non-binary, and international fan artists) that I cite. I show that these fan artists' work can and should be engaged with with as much critical seriousness and rigour as contemporary artworks. By doing so, we engage with a much broader community of practitioners, whose work not only

has artistic and critical merits, but also brings a sense of passion, intimacy and joy to the fore - qualities that are often missing from many contemporary art practices and critical engagements.

AUDIENCES, ARCHIVES, ACCESSIBILITY

Transformational fandom is often seen as a non-hierarchical space, 'it's largely a democracy of taste; everyone has their own shot at declaring what the source material means, and at radically re-interpreting it' (obsession_inc, 2009, online). Using practice-research within fan studies allows for a more democratic sharing of findings; to return to Willis, while I recognise that an art institution such as Jerwood Visual Arts has different cultural capital than many fan art platforms, it is still engaged with by far more audiences than an academic journal would be. By using a re-versioning technique, and creating a meta-archive on YouTube, I am positioning the practice-research on a platform used by fan communities themselves. As performance academic Rachel Hann states, the 'second wave' of practice research will be focused on questions of accessibility and quality, and a shared disciplinary discourse (Hann, 2015, online). My practice-research acts as fan art *of* fan art, and disseminates it in a way that I hope is engaging and accessible to fans. I believe that fan and media studies should engage with this 'second wave' of practice-research, to better understand fan creative practices, to celebrate and highlight fan labour, to demonstrate fans' importance in creating cultural narratives, and to more widely share our research findings back with fans.

Throughout the thesis, I explore modes of creative again-ness. This is a quality inherent in producerly practices, in the re-versioning techniques that I have employed, and in the presentation modes I have chosen to present the practice-research - using YouTube as a meta-archive. As I position producerly practices as cyclical and inherently archival, it is fitting that the work is presented in this manner. As curator Okwui Enwezor states:

Artists interrogate the self-evidentiary claims of the archive by reading it against the grain. This interrogation may take aim at the structural and functional principles underlying the use of the archival document, *or it may result in the creation of another archival structure as a means of establishing an archaeological relationship to history, evidence, information, and data that will give rise to its own interpretative categories.* (2008, p. 18, my italics).

The YouTube *Poor Copy* channel acts as a new meta-archive, a fan archive of fan practices, and also mirrors the findings of the thesis as a whole. First, it reflects my (and fanac's) use of re-versioning. De Kosnik positions this as an iterative method of making particular to fandom, but which also pertains to software programming and performance. She presents practices of again-ness as 'creative appropriation', an act of memory that gives onto an act of versioning, where versioning is a performative act which is inherently citational (2016, p. 304). Digital archives such as YouTube are key repositories for (re-)versioned artworks:

The contents of digital archives often consist of versions and variations of source texts[...] to say that these digital transmediations and appropriations are forms of "archontic production" references the memory mode of archive - the treatment of bodies of pre-existing texts as archive from which any user can withdraw the raw materials for new projects - *and* the memory mode of repertoire - the process by which humans receive cultural matter *in their bodies* and, by using their bodies as playback machines, perform works that they record (via primary retention) in their own ways, making up their own imaginative transformations of the works (via process of secondary retention) (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 303).

Re-versioning therefore is an archival practice in which performance (and memory) is key. One of the reasons that I have chosen to use the YouTube channel as a 'landing place' for the re-versioned practice-research is because of this tension between digital archives, documentation, and performance. Drawing on De Kosnik's statement, we can see that versioned texts in digital archives are performatives. As Philip Auslander argues 'documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance and [...] the performer as "artist"' (Auslander, 2006, p. 5). The re-versioned practice-research artworks as YouTube videos are not an indexical access point to a past event but 'perceiving the document

itself as a performance that directly reflects an artist's aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience' (Auslander, 2006, p. 9). The aesthetic sensibility, the contextual information, the structures, authors and audiences of YouTube, mirrors the 'pre-existing texts as archive' which I have used as both material and template for a method of making throughout the research project. As Auslander states, documentation signals the performer as artist; by making the case that those active in transformational fandoms are artists, I position YouTube as a platform for art. Indeed, even those who do not create new content but upload fan playlists demonstrate the importance of 'technovolunteers', and that these actions are performative acts of repertoire:

The structures of digital archives privileges repertoire as every digital archive does not remain stable on its own, but depends on archivists constantly repeating certain routines of archive maintenance over time (De Kosnik, 2016, p. 303).

It is important to note that while my thinking is informed by De Kosnik's work, she does not position YouTube as a 'rogue archive', as it is not committed to the long-term preservation of user-led content: YouTube often deletes videos due to copyright issues (2016, p.18). Henry Jenkins similarly does not position YouTube as a part of participatory culture as it is owned by Google, and thus content is often commercialized (2010, online). While I recognise these statements as true, the other online platforms I considered were less appropriate for my meta-archive: Archive Of Our Own only allows for text fan works, UbuWeb is focused solely on visual art, the audience of the Research Catalogue of the Journal for Artistic Research is solely academic. YouTube is less specialised, with a potential wider audience for the practice-research outcomes. Some of the fans that informed the artworks (for example, many of the football fans I spoke with) are not active on online fan spaces, so for them, YouTube is a familiar online space. It is also my intention to highlight web 2.0 and other media corporations' role within the creation of star texts and pop culture myths such as that of Jackson, and as such, it makes sense to be situated within this platform. I position YouTube as a key non-institutional

archive used by creative practitioners, whose paratextual framings add to its user-driven historiographic practices.

The YouTube *Poor Copy* channel as meta-archive is a practice-research presentation methodology, that is constituted of fan practice methods. YouTube itself constitutes an archive of archives, hosting millions of channels which each host individual videos and playlists. The *Poor Copy* channel serves a number of functions: an archive of practice-research, an archive of fannish videos and artworks which I cite, an umbrella archive with a specific focus that connects to other archives within YouTube. There may be cleaner and clearer ways to present the practice-research, but my hope is that this method of presentation reflects my experience of researching within fan and user-led digital archives; a networked and messy experience of diving into many smaller archival silos linked together in a sometimes haphazard way. For De Kosnik, a meta-archive is a virtual and conceptual archive, which encompasses a source text or originary and all variations of it produced by readers, creators, fans (2016, p. 34). While my YouTube channel does not hold infinite possible retellings of the Jackson in Devon histories, its construction does nod to an inherent shareability and its producerly potentials. Narratives that may have been mis- or under-reported to a local community can be given agency and credence to an international fan audience by fan labour methods such as fanvidding and fansubbing and by then sharing on YouTube which has an international reach. Fans thus challenge mainstream media and cultural historical canons by their moving image practices.

In immersing oneself in the *Poor Copy* YouTube channel, the works can be engaged with as an encounter, rather than the more linear outcome of a search engine algorithm. Digital archiving invites the work to be further appropriated, read, and possibly reworked. I do not classify some of the videos I have included as practice-research outcomes in themselves; they

do however help to build a picture of different tropes of fannish methods of making, YouTube platform genres, and fan forum styles. Some of these also make use of methods of YouTube genres which were not as relevant to the thesis as to warrant analysis, but reflect YouTube video tropes such as ‘haul’ videos, unboxing⁴⁵, etc. These videos nod to the language and materiality of the archival platforms I am engaging with, and the documents’ narratives within, as well as the experience of engaging with them as a researcher, when the amount of available digital information can be overwhelming.

An example of this is the video I made from the You Too Brutus blogpost ‘Matt Fiddes Michael Jackson Lies Over Blanket’s Biology’:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg3DmUhYGbY&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjFa1hCI7eNWol7gCB7Wmip&index=11>

There are further specific reasons as to why I chose to present the practice-research via YouTube. The first is that the broadcast of the *Leaving Neverland* documentary investigating allegations of child sex abuse by Michael Jackson was broadcast in March 2019.

The *Leaving Neverland* trailer for HBO:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KtZ1jWKPzo&list=PLbHdpeGnwWFjZZSuqiLZF5rwqqq5-vFSp&index=2>

Since these allegations first came to light in 1992, they have had an impact on how we engage with narratives of Jackson (as artist, audience, or fan), however, the release of the *Leaving Neverland* documentary has acted as a watershed moment for many in how they think of

⁴⁵ Haul videos are video recordings posted online which detail items recently bought by the video creator. An example is a vlogger discussing the items bought in a clothing sale. Unboxing videos document the video maker unpacking purchased or gifted items, these can be tech related e.g. a video console, beauty items, clothes, etc (Influencer Agency, 2020, online).

Jackson. When one knows the traumatic details of the victims' lived experience, it is impossible to forget. As Susan Sontag (2003) discusses in 'Regarding The Pain of Others', the generic can allow viewers to sidestep a deeper sense of empathy. When we know specifics, this is not as easy to do - trauma confronts us in the details. For me, both Jackson's music and histories have become overshadowed by the testimonies shared by James Safechuk and Wade Robson in *Leaving Neverland*. I believe that the readings of my artwork are now weighted with this knowledge, that it is hard to read nuance of Jackson's actions or his fan community within the work without returning to his abuses. The decision to represent the work in an archival form via YouTube channel, rather than restaging or reworking an exhibition, is not an action which follows 'cancel culture' - eradicating a pop cultural presence from our consciousness. Rather, it recognises the importance of intertextual readings when engaging with the narratives of celebrity. The digital archive also gives audiences more physical distance and control over how they engage with the practice-research.

Around the time of the *Leaving Neverland* documentary airing in the UK, I was inundated with additional requests for interviews from regional and national journalists. After discussions with several journalists, I declined them all; I felt that the journalists were looking for a simple 'innocent/guilty' discussion rather than an interest in the work or the Jackson fan community (of which I don't feel I can represent appropriately anyway, as a visitor to that world). This strengthened my decision not to show the *Poor Copy* work in art spaces again; demonstrating how strongly the intertextual readings are now bent towards the child sexual abuse narratives. I did agree to an interview, however, with journalist Joel Cooper of the North Devon Journal (who wrote the article about the Barnstaple gig which was taken down in less than 24 hours and which first alerted me to this history). Cooper contacted me in early 2019, after reading about *Poor Copy* online via the Exeter Phoenix and Jerwood Visual Arts websites. He was

writing an article which reconsidered the Barnstaple gig twenty years after the fact, and contacted me to include a section on the practice-research artwork *No Such Event Took Place*. This was an interesting and cyclical return to some of the original sources that had so impacted the research project, and an opportunity to share my understanding of the fan communities' cultural memories back with a local audience.

The second reason for using YouTube as a platform is that I feel that my solo show, *Poor Copy*, as part of Jerwood Visual Art's 'Staging Series' in September 2018, represented a physical consolidation and culmination of the practice elements of the thesis. Working with the curators to consider the inter-relations of the works between three large gallery spaces enabled me to realise and present the practice in what I consider to be the most appropriate and considered physical way. Gallery one hosted *Like A Pantomime*; offering a fan historiography of the Jackson in Exeter event. Gallery two hosted the videowork *Yes, It Really Did Happen*, which platformed a local media narration of the same event. In gallery three, the *raremjvideos1* videowork showed an 'insider' view of the incident. The Jerwood exhibition was the final curatorial versioning process 'IRL' (that is, 'in real life' and offline) of any of the works.

Another reason why I chose to present the practice-research via YouTube channel that forms part of this thesis is the fact that it reproduces the effect of an information overload of many digital archives used by fans to access and share fan-related content. The 'recommended' and 'up next' list of videos, the paratextual information surrounding the videos, and the comments, all lead to many possible online decisions after (or while) engaging with the current video content. This demonstrates the digital haptic diagrammatic readings that audiences may have when engaging with my practice-research, with fanvids and fansubs, and with other digital archival content. While there is more than just the digital additional information of the

YouTube platform which affects the diagrammatic reading of each artwork (for example, our own subjectivities, experiences, knowledges), the YouTube ‘web’ which invites the viewer to click on related content, does visually demonstrate a diagrammatic network of meaning-making, in a way which is both clear and messy.

This echoed my experience of working with non-institutional or user-driven digital archives during this research project. Archival documents and texts which were often unlooked for or unexpected presented themselves to me while following a digital bread crumb trail, which at times took the work in new unlooked for but relevant directions. This is reflected in the *Poor Copy* YouTube presentation model; for example, when I click on the appendices playlist, I have a number of suggested videos under the Playlist menu. These include *Pearl Vision* (another work by Mark Leckey), a video named *Gabber Dance*, another called *BBC Exit Poll 1992-2017*, and a clip from *Romesh Talking To Comedians: Getting Your Period During A Performance*. These additional possible next viewings will be different for each YouTube viewer, informed by the current video (*Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* by Mark Leckey) and an algorithm which tracks what the viewer has seen before and may wish to see in the future. Therefore, we can see how YouTube as host for both appropriation and presentation is diagrammatic; it is what artist-researcher Simon O’Sullivan calls a diagrammatic ‘nesting of fictions within fictions’ (2016, p. 23). O’Sullivan states that memory, feedback loops, and temporal instability are common to diagrammatic practices, which I argue are qualities inherent to fannish engagements with YouTube as both source material and as exhibition platform. As O’Sullivan asks:

Might this diagrammatics also involve a different take on relations among the past, present, and future? This is the “drawing” of lines between different times, the building of circuits and the following of feedback loops; it is to understand time as specific to any given system (or practice) and not as neutral background. This might involve diagramming the way a different kind of future can work back on the present (and determine how we act or make in the here and now). Or, indeed, diagramming how the

present itself can involve a re-engineering of the past (understood as resource and living archive) that will then allow a different kind of future to emerge. (O’Sullivan, 2016, p. 24).

Through the diagrammatic presentations of my practice-as-research artworks, I have created what can be considered a new fannish archive of the Jackson at Exeter event. But this archive is producerly, not fixed. In fact, all YouTube-hosted content are producerly documents; the videos invite fannish transformation. This is evidenced by the postproduction approach of fans via fansubbing and fanvidding: editing and reworking existing archival fragments to create new iterative artworks. There is thus an invitation for elements of the practice-research *Poor Copy* YouTube channel to be appropriated and reworked or re-versioned again (perhaps by fans); they are producerly texts which are not singular or stable.

Both fanworks online and artworks in contemporary art contexts demonstrate the mutability of creative practice and their unfixed readings. Different presentation contexts and versions demonstrate how both fan and contemporary art practices are read and understood. Metatextual and paratextual information, haptic information, audience biases and knowledges, all lead to a diagrammatic reading of the creative work. Deleuze’s reading of Foucault states that the diagram is ‘a display of the relations between forces which constitute power’, and that it proceeds by ‘non-localizable relations and at every moment passes through every point’ (1999, pp. 31-32). The artworks are, with each presentation and re-versioning, placed anew in this diagrammatic network of meaning-making, both responding to and extending fannish archives.

COMMUNITIES, CONTENTIOUS HISTORIES, DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

Community and subjectivity

While I have never been a fan of Jackson, I grew up with his music. As I was born in 1986, his work was an integral part of my pop cultural landscape: inheriting a hand-me down *Thriller* record from my cousin, clapping the moonwalking friend at a primary school disco, seeing Jackson advertise Pepsi on the infamous adverts. However, it was important that throughout the research project that I positioned myself clearly as not within the Jackson (or the Exeter City Football Club) fandom. In fact, I position myself as not really a fan of anything in particular - at least not in the fan studies' frame of active fan participation (Hills, 2002; Duffett, 2013). While there are many musicians, film directors, and artists whose work I follow and enjoy, there is no single cultural property that I identify so strongly and closely with as to be called a fan. Instead, as an artist-researcher, I am interested in, and admire, fan creativity and passion.

Specifically I work through transformative fan practices in this thesis. Fandom's other side of the coin, affirmational fandom, has not been the subject of my analysis in the same way. Affirmational fandom is a creator-centric section of fan communities, which instead of remixing and expanding a canon of a cultural property, positions the original author or fan-subject as the only authority on that fandom - that is, the only one who can produce culture of worth within that fandom (obsession_inc, 2009, online). Affirmational fans often engage in collecting behaviour (whether merchandise or facts about a cultural property), rather than creative and transformative behaviours. Fanfic writer and fanvidder Skud (2009, online) states that affirmational fandom can be characterised by professional dissemination, hierarchies, author-centric canons, use of real names, and that the fandoms are male dominated. By contrast, key characteristics of transformative fandoms are amateur-production spheres,

participation, remixing, ‘mess’, and are majority female. While transformational fandom is my focus, at times in my detective-like quest for more information about the Jackson in Devon histories, I echo affirmational fan behaviours. These behaviours are fan actions that are often critiqued - mainstream media portraying many fans as being obsessive. For example, the cliché of a Star Trek fan knowing the narrative detail of every plot line of every episode. Even though historical narrative accuracy has not been a goal of the research project (indeed, I have argued against the concept of objective historical truth throughout this thesis), it is something I have been inadvertently been working towards by gathering these remembrances. Within this practice-research project is a detailed knowledge of the events via fan and media retellings and it is possible that, by mapping the weird narrative threads of these histories, I have been doing the same thing as the clichéd affirmational fan ‘obsessive’.

Using an interdisciplinary practice-research methodology has allowed me to think through the ethics of engaging with the communities doing the remembering of the Jackson in Devon histories in a number of different ways. As far as possible I wanted both fan communities to avoid being ‘researched parties’, but instead invested collaborators in the making of the practice-research, and while this was true with the ECFC fans, the Jackson fans could more accurately be positioned as participants. However, as someone outside of both those fan communities, it could be argued there is an ethnographic approach to this research, which fan studies scholars have previously problematised (Hills, 2002). It is important to remember that fandoms are not comprised of a mass of individuals who all subscribe to the same rules and expectations (Busse and Hellekson, 2012, p. 51), and so I aimed to make my methods of engagement malleable and responsive to individuals’ desires.

Community cultural memory

The development of the practice-research, and specifically *Like A Pantomime*, engaged with fans as collaborators, as ‘cultural citizens’ (Hills, 2007; Hartley 1999, Sandvoss 2003; Van Zoonen 2005), who make critical contributions to media (and performance) cultures, and who are often best placed to analyse their own communities, cultural memory, and community historiography. Contemporary cultural memory is made possible via media, through orality and literacy, print media, radio, television, the internet. The relationship between media and mediation is a kind of switchboard at work between the personal and collective dimensions of remembering (Erll, 2016, p. 113). In the case of eyewitnesses, for example the Jackson and Exeter fans who saw Jackson’s speech, this process of mediation and recirculation allows the personal to become ‘externalized’, becoming socially shared. The three distinct document types used to inform *Like A Pantomime* were created and disseminated in very different ways: oral histories as example of the personal and embodied memory; local newspapers as regional histories engaged with via analogue processes, and online fan accounts as global and online narratives.

Within *Like A Pantomime*, these different sources of dialogue are collaged via a process of remediation⁴⁶, further supporting their place in a wider cultural memory. In the age of the internet as ‘global mega-archive’ (Erll, 2016, p. 4), there is a danger of losing cultural memories which rest as unread data, or ‘dead knowledge’ on servers and hard drives. Choosing and recirculating memories stored in this way becomes a process of remediation in the era of what digital memory scholar Andrew Hoskins (2001) terms ‘new memory’. There is a co-construction and feedback loop between cultural ‘new’ memory and of media, which has come

⁴⁶ For digital memory scholar Andrew Hoskins (2001), our relation to the past must be considered in terms of mediation and remediation - of archiving via television, news outlets, and online, and of its recirculation using these mediated documents as sources.

to the fore with what Hoskins terms ‘the connective turn’. The multiplicity of digital connections and abundance, fluidity and reproducibility of digital data underpins and enables the process of remediation.

This cyclical practice of remediation, as conceptualised by David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999, p. 55), places this process in an iterative chain:

Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media.

Remediation therefore traces the genealogy of media, the ‘memory of media’, following Renate Lachmann’s (2010) description of intertextuality as the memory of literature. For Lachmann, intertextuality depicts the ways that literary and non-literary texts always quote, paraphrase, and refer to extant texts of a culture; this does not detract from the creative and critical potential of the *reinscribing of transcribing* - intertexts can distort, reverse, resemanticise existing texts. Cultural memory when platformed via verbatim performance is both created by and creates an intertextual play; all texts are ‘products of their distancing and surpassing of precursor texts’ (p. 305), and are characterised by their paradoxical and symbiotic qualities of latency and manifestness. At its heart, intertextuality celebrates the critical and creative potentials of ‘again-ness’ in producerly practices, and demonstrates its inextricable relationship with cultural memory.

Cancel culture and intertextuality

What of my ideological engagement of Jackson himself? While I don’t feel this is at the forefront of the work, I believe he was guilty, although also ill, not that that in any way excuses the horrors that he allegedly perpetrated. Instead of either side-stepping or owning a personal

judgement on Jackson through the *Poor Copy* work, the Jackson re-iterations confronts viewers (and myself) with his explicit and implicit histories. The *Leaving Neverland* (Reed, 2019) documentary had a huge effect on how Jackson and his work is read, and while this premiered after I had made the practice-research elements of the thesis, it has had a large influence on the practice-research's readings and contexts.

The thinking through of how to engage with a fan object and its community in the light of such allegations is pertinent and timely. In the last few years, allegations of sexual harrasment and sexual assault in the entertainment industry has been prevalent. In 2017, the #MeToo movement was popularized by many high-profile celebrities who tweeted the hashtag to raise the visibility of survivors of sexual assault. The allegations and convictions against men working in the entertainment industry such as Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., R Kelly, and many more, have not only enabled conversations around power and sexual assault, but also pose questions around who deserves a platform, who is believed, and how we consume culture. Another social media movement reacted to these allegations; in 'cancel culture', consumers and social media participants pledge to ignore a celebrity's projects, or refuse to buy a company's products or services. Jackson is at the centre of a cancel culture debate, and while it is easy to turn off Jackson's music and to redact him from pop culture, it could be argued that this also erases histories of trauma. As music critic and Jackson fan Ann Powers (2019, online) states 'if anything will get me to stop listening to Michael Jackson's music, it's my own unwillingness to keep living with this problem presented by my own pleasure'. The problem of ghosts that haunt our engagement with Jackson histories and texts, however far removed from the allegations.

This tension is seen by how I portray the figure of Jackson: he is rarely seen in the body of artwork in *Poor Copy*. At first this was not a conscious decision, but as the research project continued, it was a more purposeful tactic. It could be emotional, upsetting, and at times draining to confront the horrors in the Jackson historical canon. And even more so when I had to defend my position of believing him to be guilty against sometimes very defensive fans. It could be hard to see Jackson not as a monster, while I also felt I had a responsibility to his fans not to caricature him or portray him solely in this way. Sometimes removing him from the frame of reference felt like the only way forward of ethical and responsible re(-)presentation. The varying and at times conflicting layers of responsibility I felt (towards the fans, towards the victims of Jackson, towards my subjective position, and towards the knowledge-generation process), as discussed in Chapter Five, could be difficult to navigate. It is my contention that when working with histories that we later understand to have been built on trauma, one needs to confront rather than eliminate these narratives. Discursive methods of engagement are important methodological tools to engage with these narratives.

Discursive strategies

This thesis offers several possible methodological choices for researchers who are working with contentious histories with communities that one may be outside of or a ‘visitor’ to. The making of my practice-research was dialogic rather than isolated; *Like A Pantomime* not only platforms fan voices but also engaged them in the construction and analysis of how their words were presented. My methodology - a practice-research approach which works with others - also used a re-versioning process which gave the communities I was working with several opportunities to reflect, change, or feedback on their contribution to the research. It responds to Evans and Stasi’s call to ‘take up these discursive practices and really live through them’ (2014, online). The re-versioning process meant I had a number of ‘sharing’ opportunities of

research-in-progress, including draft scripts, scratch performances followed by discussions with oral history interviews, and versioned videoworks shared with different audiences. Using strategies of sharing work-in-progress performances, sharing revised scripts and transcripts, and post-performance discussions, as I have done, can offer opportunities for self-reflection for fans, and means that fans can move away from being colonised research subjects to active participants and collaborators in the research project. I believe that this strategy was an ethical choice, giving those implicated in the research more control of their voice, but also a choice which enriched the research process - many research 'participants' became collaborators.

Re-versioning is a method that means researchers can think carefully not only about how research 'participants' are represented, but also about how the findings are shared back with them. While I have decided against showing the *Poor Copy* practice-research in art spaces again, there is one additional exhibition opportunity, to be hosted in a fan community context: the Exeter City Football Club Museum. This seems a fitting context to return the artworks to the home of fans who were so instrumental in their making, and I am pleased that the research project has offered an opportunity to some fan communities to reflect on their own methods of cultural memory production and historiographies; I suggest that researchers can consider community spaces which those communities have ownership of as sites to share findings.

Verbatim is a powerful discursive methodological tool within fan studies as it mirrors fannish modes of making (fanfic, fan art) by destabilising the canonicity of a narrative, 're-telling' it through the lens of varying subjectivities. It also offers an ethical case study for engaging with fans when contentious fan-subjects are being researched; recognising a sometimes-present advocacy agenda while still recognising research participants' generosity, creativity, and knowledges. This advocacy agenda is particularly important to fan and media studies scholars

who are working with artists and entertainers who have contentious or traumatic associated histories. The multiplicity of fan voices platforms different and differing fan remembrances, and highlights that the logic of history is not one of discovery but of construction. In *Like A Pantomime*, the verbatim methodology used acts as an embodied fanfic of the cultural memory of the fan communities; simultaneously subverting and affirming the fan communities' historical narratives. Iterative modes of making in the performance (verbatim, remediation, intertextuality) are layered to both construct and deconstruct fan historiography and cultural memory, and demonstrates that these are in turn similarly iterative and positively palimpsestic.

While many scholars have asserted the need for a canvassing of ethical approaches of verbatim, others have stated the dangers of adhering too closely to the idea of a clear and inflexible ethical guideline, warning that it can stifle innovation and doesn't give sufficient agency or nuance to the communities engaging with the work (Gibson, 2006; Fisher, 2011). Similar debates are mirrored within fan studies and its engagements with fan-respondents. Verbatim as a method within fan studies disturbs the utopian idea of a democratic 'truth forum' (Gibson, 2006, p. 2), instead celebrating this mode of making as one that can encapsulate many different, at times even contradictory, 'truths'. While debates of editorial ethics of verbatim will no doubt continue, equally important is the artist's methods of engaging with those communities and multiple voices. The complex ethical manoeuvring of verbatim and other documentary/appropriative iterative practices also brings audience agency to the fore.

Different fan recollections demonstrate different fan advocacy agendas; at times a fan's decision not to engage with an oral history interview can speak as loudly as the most articulate interviewee. I demonstrate that fan advocacy agendas are integral to the mythologising of a fan object. The Jackson abuse allegations also have an influence on how we read historical

documentation, at times causing it to be received as ‘evidence’. While my practice-research does call into question historical fragments’ evidentiary or objective qualities, there is at times a forensic-like characteristic to the work. This close reading can be read as both fannish and decidedly non-fannish, even apprehensive. The documents used in the practice are presented as neither fact nor fiction, instead both are present within the palimpsest of repetitions in the work. The representation of trauma was also worked through via the practice-research; even through silences and gaps in the archives, the fans, my own, and the audiences’ responses in relation to the Jackson child sexual abuse allegations were highlighted. Like the fans I was working with, and the potential audiences for my work, I was implicated in an ethical matrix; there is a ‘response-ability’ within the frame of engagement which provokes us to engage with the themes and content within the exhibition context, and to reflect on our relationship to those things and ideas *outside* of the exhibition space, in the ‘real world’. The producerly works in *Poor Copy* are open enough that audiences can reflect and respond as best they see fit. Discursive methods of making recognise the importance of response-ability: by using re-versioning processes to share works in progress with various audiences, response-ability is fostered. It ensures that analysis is not solely pointed at the subject of the practice-research, but also encompasses the maker and audiences. It recognises the multiplicities of voices in the work, and also the multiplicities of responses to the work.

With these multiplicities comes different perspectives and at times, disagreements. Within my practice-research, this was highlighted by my discussions with Jackson fans who believed him to be innocent, and who pressed me for my position on the allegations. I recognise that there may often be situations where researchers and research participants may disagree, and offer agonism as an approach which addresses this. Agonism, within an art ecology (as positioned by Claire Bishop), aims to create a space of discussion, making, and presentation of artworks

which, rather than reach a utopian ideal of consensus, highlights the social and political realities of the context in which the work was made (Bishop, 2004, p. 70). ‘Agonistic pluralism’, as described by Chantal Mouffe, acknowledges the ‘ineradicability of antagonism’, and positions those who we disagree with not as ‘somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question’ (Mouffe, 2000, p. 15). I offer an agonist approach when working with communities in practice-research as a deliberate tactic to include a multiplicity of voices and to recognise the complexity of the power structures that those involved are operating within. Agonism recognises that the position of a neutral or ‘hygienic’ researcher is unrealistic, it allows researchers to be honest and transparent with research participants by sharing subjective perspectives: it allowed me to state my position as feminist artist-researcher. An ethical approach does not mean a neutral one: agonism as practice-research method both analyses and gives voice to a range of fan perspectives, while also giving me voice as an artist-researcher. By recognising our subjectivities and position within cultural creation and consumption, and by using agonist approaches to discussions with communities that fan, media, theatre and performance, and fine art academics may be researching with, we can more carefully consider our own assumptions about these issues and the privileges of power that affects cultural memory, pop culture, and fandom.

The dialogic research methodology established in this research project draws attention to and takes into account who has the power to tell stories, and highlights whose voices are loudest in the diagram of narrative-making. This is particularly pertinent in the UK at the current socio-political moment, where the highly concentrated nature of the British press means that contemporary press narratives are drawn from ever narrower perspectives⁴⁷. On the other hand,

⁴⁷ ‘Britain has one of the most concentrated media environments in the world. Just three companies dominate 83% of national newspaper circulation; five companies account for 80% of national newspaper newsbrand reach; five companies command 80% of local newspaper titles; and two companies own nearly half of all commercial analogue radio stations.’ (Media Reform Coalition, 2019, online)

many internet users (especially digital natives⁴⁸) are also involved in narrative-creation by interpreting producerly texts and enacting producerly practices: engaging with online fannish behaviour such as following celebrities, sharing and creating memes about pop culture, creating social media posts commenting on media narratives. While the Jackson in Devon histories were at a distinct moment in terms of the digital landscape - they happened just before the ubiquity of smartphones with cameras, and also just preceded social media being dominant networks - producerly texts and practices are now even more prevalent in history and myth-making. While I recognise my cultural capital as artist-researcher, collaborative discursive methodologies give space for other voices in historiographic research. When researching cultural memory, it is important to recognise and give room for community and grass-roots memorialisations and remembrances.

Using the Jackson in Devon narratives as a case study offers new methods and understandings for artists and researchers engaging with histories related to trauma. My engagement with archival fragments and oral histories confronts the silences and censors therein; I demonstrate that a choice not to engage, and gaps in cultural memories, can be used as productive material for practice-research. By recognising the advocacy agendas (and institutional agendas) of the communities and archives that one works with, we can more clearly point to their historiographic constructions.

FUTURE POOR COPIES

The *Poor Copy* project has thrown up almost as many questions as it has answered. One of these is the question of how ‘value’ and ‘quality’ is assessed by different communities of practitioners who use producerly practices in their work. As discussed, several of these modes

⁴⁸ A term popularised by education researcher Marc Prensky, meaning those who have grown up with digital technologies rather than learning digital systems as an adult (Prensky, 2001).

of making are very similar (see Chapter Four for discussions of iterative moving image practices across fan and contemporary art makers), yet there are different ‘gatekeepers’ to each community, different assessments of value on what makes a work admired within that community, and different hierarchical judgements made. I am interested in barriers and distinctions between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ creative practitioners being dismantled; and we can see this beginning to take place within fan spheres of creative practice. In August 2019, the fanfic website Archive Of Our Own won the prestigious Hugo award for Best Related Work. The Hugos are the speculative literary community’s most respected award, and the ‘related work’ category usually goes to books or essays which involve critical commentary of a sci-fi or fantasy text. For Archive Of Our Own and its over 20,000,000 fanfic writers, this was a hugely significant moment; these creative practitioners’ whose works are often dismissed as ‘hobbyist’, so this validation helped to break the assumption of ‘amateurish’ qualities of fanfic.

I will use the skills and knowledge gained through my thesis project to continue to consider gaps, silences, and censorship in archives, and a community of interest’s response to this. I have two current and forthcoming bodies of work to explore this. The first considers institutional and non-institutional commemorations of anti-nuclear activism, focusing on the Dump Information Group (or DIG) as a case study for this. DIG were a group of anti-nuclear activists who were active in the 1980s and 1990s, protesting against the storage of decommissioned nuclear submarines in Devonport Dockyard, Plymouth. A further tension in censorship or silence in archives is platformed when considering military organizations, nuclear politics, and state secrets - or perhaps a lack of engagement with feminist socio-political protest from the state. The second considers how to work through gaps and biases of archives and contemporary mainstream historiographies via my curating and producing work.

In 2019 and 2020 I have been programming and producing a Heritage Lottery Funded cultural programme, *Reverberations*, which looks at contemporary stories of migration in Teats Hill, an underserved community in Plymouth, in light of the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower in 2020. Specifically I will be thinking through how to bring agonism as a tactic for problematizing the dominant historical narratives in the main Mayflower 400 programme, amplifying voices of migrant community members of Plymouth whose own lived experiences and recent histories are often silenced, and thinking about the link between producerly practices and decolonisation.

What links all my ‘next steps’ for work which investigate producerly practices and archives is the way in which communities are central. As Naomi Novik, one of the Archive Of Our Own co-founders, stated in her Hugo awards acceptance speech ‘all fanwork, from fanfic to vids to fanart to podfic, centers the idea that art happens not in isolation but in community’ (Novik in Romano, 2019, online). I will continue to work with community historiographies by applying this spirit of collaboration and celebration of community which is inherent within so many fan practices. What I’m really a fan of is, is fandom.

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APPENDIX A

8 *Poor Copies*

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It's 2018 and Beth Emily Richards and I are on the phone talking about Michael Jackson again as if facetime or messenger were never invented.

There's always anxiety waiting for the phone to ring. Even if you've arranged the call and you know the person calling, even if you know that it won't be bad news. And then when you're on the phone and it's happening, it's like you can never forget you're on the phone; like, there is something totally nostalgic, self-conscious and embarrassing about being on the phone in 2018 that feels like a performance – like an Andy-Warhol-on-the-phone-to-Brigit-Berlin *impersonation*; or a Jacques-Derrida-on-the-phone-to- H             *tribute act*. Suspended in time (“Hello, From the Other Side”) you and all the ghosts of other telephones (like, red ones with actual spiral leads and receivers) are on the line, *performing*, listening, almost always holding in a pee.

I'm writing about the phone call here because I think there is something intrinsically distinctive about the phone call as an experience “both distant and inside one's head” (Cixous) that speaks to the experience of Beth Emily Richards' show *Poor Copy* at The Northern Charter (Newcastle, April 2018). While the phone call became the prime conduit for my communication with Beth leading up to the exhibition, it also becomes a generative way of re-orientating oneself (particularly one's ears, but also one's bladder) to history, objects and things.

1. *Poor Archives*

Poor Copy builds on Richards' art practice and sustained engagement with contemporary mythmaking in respect to practices of tribute and re-enactment; suspension of disbelief; the veracity of photography's documentary qualities; pop cultural icons, celebrity and fame. The exhibition is an archive of found documents, evidencing a set of peculiar yet-interrelated narratives related to “King of Pop” Michael Jackson's unexpected visit to Devon, England on two separate occasions. This includes a speech at the local Exeter Football Club in 2003 organized by the TV personality, illusionist and “spoon bender” Uri Geller; and a gig in the nearby town of Barnstaple in 1999. Although, Beth tells me that in regards to the latter, “it's not entirely certain whether it was the real Jackson or in fact an impersonator”.

The show's title *Poor Copy* points to the notion of a deprived repetition. This is instanced in the show through the various low-fi and amateur archival components including a fan-made banner saying “Welcome to Exeter Michael”, shaky youtube footage of Jackson's visit to Exeter Football Club from Uri Geller's point of view, and a poorly captured photo of an alleged Jackson concert in nearby town of Barnstaple accompanied by a text-to-voice email correspondence about that concert, as well as a video of a microfiche machine scanning local newspaper articles related to both of Jackson's visitations.

The materials in the exhibition have been selected and occasionally filmed and edited with little transformation of the source material. The materials have been assembled as fragments that re-produce an archive of evidence. There is something of the forensic to this exhibition,

which is perhaps not only because we're talking about Michael Jackson (a suspect figure) – but because archives and phone calls seem to always suggest that some crime has been committed – some scandal or forgery – a copy maybe – or in the case of Jackson - something more sinister.

2. *Poor Stories*

Poor stories are good stories. Like all good stories on the phone, there are three protagonists in this one: Michael Jackson, Uri Geller (who Beth tells me invites Jackson to Exeter as a publicity stunt), and body guard Matt Fiddes (who Beth also informs me organized the Barnstaple concert, and later on a Channel 4 documentary *The Jacksons are Coming to Devon*, as well as selling stories – such as the alleged donating of his sperm to the pop star – to several tabloid newspapers).

In the youtube footage of Jackson's journey to Exeter and subsequent speech, the event is heightened by the absolute chaos of fans screaming, pushing and shoving on Jackson's arrival, and Geller's shaky documenting and repeatedly pleading with the fans – "Honour him/you're crushing him" – with only the rare glimpse of Jackson's arm or profile as he leaves London Paddington station and later arrives at Exeter Football Club. The disorientating video adds to the hype of this event, the hysteria of the fans, as well as the confused feelings of the crowds. On the phone, Beth tells me that Jackson's empty and clearly affected "We come here to support children with AIDS" speech leaves the crowds at the football club questioning whether it was in fact "the real Jackson". The uncertainty of whether these events actually took place or not are what constitute the real point of fascination in this show. While *Poor Copy* suggests that the Exeter appearance was "the real Jackson" and the Barnstaple concert was a hoax, Beth tells me that the public nevertheless questioned the authenticity of both events.

Rather than attempting to point to any totalizing narrative, *Poor Copy* maintains a productive ambiguity. By refusing to categorise or substantiate the evidence, the scrambled narrative points to possibility. Methodologically, this archive merits a comparison to William Burroughs' "cut-ups" in the way that it is constitutive of re-assembled fragments of a greater narrative. This is also what distinguishes it from "fake news". In regards to his assemblage texts, Burroughs claimed, "When you cut into the present, the future leaks out". These are the material conditions of the poor story. It is also from here that we might find a connection between poor stories, urban myths and the folkloric concept of Ostension, which is when real life happenings parallel the events told in urban myths and lore.

On the phone, as the past but also "the future leaks out", I remind Beth of another poor story in which Jackson plays one of the three main protagonists:

Terrorists have attacked New York City. So Michael Jackson, Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando pile into a car and get the heck out of there, stopping at fast food joints as they trek across the country...
(*The New Yorker*)

An urban legend, which has since become a short story by popular novelist Zadie Smith (*Escape from New York*, 2015) and an awkwardly received Sky Arts series (*Urban Myths*, 2017) in which white actor Joseph Fiennes plays Michael Jackson, *Poor Copy* draws its inspiration from another questionable story about Jackson, which in turn becomes a real life

art show (and phone call) about Jackson's visit to Devon. The expansive relations across these events – suggest that whether fake or not, poor stories often lead to real consequences.

3. *Poor-becomings*

An illusive figure, a monster of late capitalism, particularly in his deteriorated state (both in terms of his health and reputation) towards the end of his life in 2009, Michael Jackson was in a state of poor-becoming.

The idea of “the real Jackson” seems totally arbitrary given Jackson's skin bleached and surgically manipulated plasticity – a face whose foundation could no longer withstand the number of surgeries. “The man in the mirror” was in fact a stranger like no other. As Cynthia Fuchs notes in her essay *Michael Jackson's Penis*, another forensic account of Jackson's life, “Black or white, male or female, young or old, sexed or not, Jackson's image refuses knowable, previously constituted subjectivities”. This refusal of the copy, this refusal to imitate, repeat or conform; this refusal of age, gender, race, sexuality “maintains a productive ambiguity and leaves open the possibility that those identity categories might be recontextualized in different ways”. (Fuchs) The ambiguities of Jackson's subjectivity are mirrored in the ambiguous narratives around which *Poor Copy* operates. In another essay *Dead Man in the Mirror*, Michael Mario Albrecht writes, “The liminal space that discourses of Jackson occupy within a variety of identity categories, positions the artist, replete with all of the unanswered and unanswerable questions.” This is also how such figures become prone to or subjugated by gossip, scandal, and exaggeration – the recipe for any good poor-story.

As a poor copy, Jackson's living-corpse renders so unbelievable, so ‘unreal’ that his presence always already renders an absence. Ontologically – his mere existence – as a poor copy is always already questionable. Referring to the vast number of billboards advertising Jackson's *Dangerous Tour*, which never came to fruition due to his premature death at the age of fifty, Jeremy Gilbert writes: “The actuality of Michael Jackson seemed to have been not merely distorted, but overwhelmed, drowned in the sea of its own images.” Gilbert is talking here about a Baudrillardian simulacrum, which has no reference to the “real” world. In hypereality there are no real objects only simulacrum. What Gilbert suggest, however, is that Jackson proves this theory wrong. Seeping through the simulacrum of the mass-marketed glossy Jackson was his “terrifyingly real sexuality” as well as his body and “its visual incapacity to submit to endless modification due to the too-frequent plastic surgery [...] becoming symbolic not of the submersion of the Real, but of its stubborn and irrevocable return.” For Gilbert, this is the Real abstraction of Michael Jackson.

4. *Poor Evidence*

On the phone, returning to these events at Exeter and Barnstaple, Beth also warns me “while poststructuralist methods are useful for exposing the instability of the archive, the truth nevertheless sometimes just shows up”. In the video of the microfiche scanner, there is a point when the camera lingers “for too long” over an image of Jackson in the local *Echo* next to which are the words “Love is Michael's Dream” and an advert which reads “Like to work with Children?” In contrast to the mechanical scanning of the Microfiche, and given the allegations

of child abuse against Jackson, this lingering feels perverse, obsessive, awkward, and too suggestive. And yet to not loiter around such tacky evidence, (in this case the haptic relation between a photograph and an advert) would also be to conceal the ways that poor evidence, like poor stories, have real consequences.

5. *Poor images ii*

A poor copy is an image constructed in your head while you're on the phone. It's Beth Emily Richards holding her mobile phone up to a photograph of a Michael Jackson impersonator on a stage in Barnstaple Devon, which could in fact be any photograph of Michael Jackson, real or fictional, on any stage, anywhere, at any time.

The title of the show *Poor Copy* consequently bares relation to the title of Hito Steyerl's much-disseminated essay *In Defense of The Poor image* (2009), which explores the valence of the low-fi digital image and its circulation in the age of the Internet. For Steyerl the poor image is "a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image... compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution." There are a number of low-fi images in Richards' exhibition both digital and analogue that resemble this description. As an archive comprised of images and texts, and as a story that instigates a series of becomings (or what might just be other stories), *Poor Copy* similarly "builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates." (Steyerl) But while Steyerl's essay privileges the visual materiality of images, there is something about Richards' *Poor Copy* that draws attention to the aural qualities of images. The invitation to put on a headset and look at a photograph encased in transparent Perspex is not the only suggestion that we might listen to these objects. While for Steyerl "The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image", with a poor copy there is no original. "This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original," but on the transience of the copy" (Steyerl) and the possibilities this opens up around questions of truth, fiction and the archive... if we just listen in.

6. *Poor communication*

While there are no actual phones or depictions of phones in this show, there is something about the exhibition that commands that you listen. Jacques Derrida says that on the phone we say "infinitely more". It is thus not unintentional that the phone be the main conduit for communication around *Poor Copy*.

In an essay titled *Derrida on the Line*, Sarah Jackson writes about the multiple references to the telephone that echo in and around Jacques Derrida's work and specifically his communication with proclaimed "lover of the telephone" Hélène Cixous. Jackson's essay, structured as a phone call to Jacques Derrida, affectively inhabits the phone call as a "poetico-technical invention", signaling that the phone be a conduit for "thought itself" (Derrida). Jackson also reminds us that Freud said the unconscious is structured like a telephone, and that the telephone is a medium for analysis, while also paying attention to the uncanny mechanisms of the telephone in terms of the ways it can cause "interference in thinking and writing".

7. Dogs

At one point during one of our hour-long phone calls I hear a dog bark down the line. It sounds like a medium to large sized dog, like maybe a Labrador. I had not expected there to be a dog in this story. If there were to be any animals it would be Jackson's pet chimpanzee Bubbles or Cixous' cat, which is always around in her conversations with Derrida. Tracing the cat back to Alexander Bell's invention of the telephone, Jackson writes, "as far as I can see it, cats are always stalking the line".

After talking to her dog, Beth apologizes for the interruption and explains that some neighbours were passing the house, and that it was the neighbours who had caused the dog to bark. It makes absolute sense that in our conversations about *Poor Copy*, that it would be a dog rather than a cat stalking our line. If the cat is a copy – "They communicate telepathically" (Cixous) – then the dog is a poor copy.

8. Michael Jacques-son as poor concept

Unlike the copy, which renders a subordinate imitation or impersonation, the poor copy is an expansive archive, is a repetition with a difference (Gilles Deleuze). It's the becoming Jacques-son of Jacques Derrida, Michael Jackson and Sarah Jackson – albeit a silly or confused idea – where history and theory maybe "just miss the point" or don't always match up.... The line cuts out, a dog barks, or a child falls over, life, truth and the future seep out "on the diagonal". The poor copy subverts an archive (or subjectivity in the case of Jackson) from within. It's the becoming-Jacques-son of the poor copy; it's the stalking of something (an idea) or someone (Michael) ungraspable, in process and only partially constituted; it's the affirmative expansion of an idea, as Cixous remarks in regards to the telephone, "Both distant and inside one's head".

On paying attention here to my phone calls with Beth, I am also saying that this exhibition is something about listening: A kind of listening that you do on the phone, the kind of attention that falls in between self-consciousness/analysis (I'm on the phone and it's 2018) and daydreaming, the kind of attention that gets interrupted by a dog. The phone call is thus not only a nostalgic metaphor or excuse for some fancy theorizing (but it could also be); it is the means through which Beth and I communicated across distance, and through which a *Poor Copy* communicates with a whole host of characters, pop icons, bodyguards, illusionists, and drag-theorists.

Text by Owen G. Parry
April 2018

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Bio

Owen G. Parry (b.1983 UK, Wales) is an artist and researcher working across performance cultures on subjects including trash, biopolitics, gay sex, fandoms, fascism, and Yoko Ono. Owen initiated the Fan Riot project (www.fanriot.tumblr.com) in 2015, exploring the relationship between art and fan practices which includes a Fan Club series, publications, artworks and performances.

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APPENDIX B

Poor, Poor Copy

Johanna Linsley

I heard about Michael Jackson's death lying on the bottom bunk in a hostel in Zagreb. I was one year into writing a PhD, and I was in the city for a conference. The previous day I had given a paper on a panel about failure and non-knowledge in contemporary performance. In spite of the subject matter, giving the paper – my first at an academic conference – felt like a step towards joining a community of articulation. This community demanded the making of claims, and this making of claims in turn demanded a kind of conjuring of myself as the sort of subject who could take on this kind of action. It was an undertaking I felt (and still feel) ambivalent about. I gave the paper, responded to questions, listened to the other quite brilliant papers on the panel, and engaged in a group discussion. Then I left the room, went outside and was sick in the carpark. I made it back to the hostel where I was staying and spent the next forty-eight hours being violently ill. I was lucky to be sharing the room with kind and caring friends who helped me rehydrate and found medication for me. It can't have been pleasant for them.

I was finally recovering when one of these friends announced that Michael Jackson had just died. The oddity of the past few days crystallised in that moment.

The illness was almost certainly a result of food poisoning, and yet I've not been able to uncouple the experience from the directly preceding conference presentation, as if my attempt at self-articulation was inextricably linked with my own physicality and vulnerability. Somehow, the corresponding event of Michael Jackson's death has made the memory significant, a kind of triangulation where what is located is the force of contingency, a slippery lesson about cause and reaction.

Questions about self-determination, self-fashioning and contingency seem to lie at the heart of Beth Emily Richards' *Poor Copy*, a series of three works circulating around appearances Michael Jackson made in Devon in the late 90s and early 2000s. As in my anecdote above, Michael Jackson as a figure lends himself to these questions. This is the figure of the exploited African-American child star who was denied the opportunity for self-determination by overwhelmingly dominating outside forces, a figure who became notorious for re-fashioning his own body and who became known as a predator. On the other hand, the difficulty of representing Michael Jackson is that he can seem like a phenomenon, like sleazy weather, as one of the last of the mega-stars, the decline in which is sometimes bemoaned as a casualty of ever narrowing market segments in the age of targeted advertising. This temptation to understand Jackson as natural phenomenon is addressed and dismantled in Mark Fisher's collection *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson*, whose Brechtian title announces an intention to locate Jackson instead among capitalist social relations.

In *Poor Copy*, Jackson-as-phenomenon is both examined and dislocated through a technique of hyper-specificity. There are two instances that the event – part of a larger body of work by Richards – addresses. First, a Michael Jackson tribute night in Barnstable in 1999 where the impersonator was so convincing, people in the audience to this day insist that it was really Michael Jackson. Second, a documented appearance by Jackson at an Exeter City Football Club match in 2002, where he made a speech at the invitation of Uri Geller, a personal friend and then-joint chairman of the club. This second appearance was apparently so dizzying in its incongruity that its veracity has been questioned even by those who were there.

Poor Copy consists of three separate works each of which responds to one of these appearances. The first the viewer encounters is *Like a Pantomime*, a live work performed by Matthew Reed and Sara Versi. The performers attempt to mimic the moves on an instructional video demonstrating how to do a Michael Jackson dance routine whilst also speaking text gathered by Richards from local sources. These include Uri Geller describing the motivation behind joining the Exeter City board – it involved a series of visions by his son about Devon, reincarnation and witchcraft. In an adjoining gallery, the video work *Yes, It Really Happened* shows local newspaper coverage of the Exeter appearance, documenting as well the public library-resourced microfiche and the slow physicality of archival research. The final gallery shows *raremjvideos1*, appropriated YouTube videos from Jackson's Exeter visit shot by his bodyguard Mike Fiddes, the shaky camera movements becoming nauseous in the dark room.

Fragments of text, spoken and printed, fill the spaces.

Express & Echo (southwest daily paper of the year) — Uri Geller invite to Jacko — First it was Michael Jackson then it was David Blaine now Exeter City trying for Madonna — Yoko Ono planning living art tribute — Yes it really did happen! — Jackson: seeing is believing for fans. Pinch yourself, it really did happen — Jackson on Exeter City board.

I ask someone to tell me who Uri Geller is and I hear about bending spoons and the power of orange.

The oldest hotel in England — David Blaine doing card tricks for kids — Honour Michael! Honour him! He's doing this for you! — A lot of weirdos around at that time — Like a pantomime.

In the constellation of these fragments, some ideas emerge:

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The condition of the document is contingency – on an 'original' or on other documents and on systems of classification and category. The condition of the impersonator is as a live contingency. The parasite is a contingent thing that becomes self-determining by destroying the thing it's contingent upon. (Long live the parasite?)

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The category of the hammy is destabilising. Hammy doesn't laugh at itself; it doesn't roll its eyes. Hammy is skilled but never virtuosic – virtuosity is defined by appearing to transcend the body. Heinrich von Kleist famously wrote in the early 19th century about the superiority of the marionette theatre over the human performer; its inhumanity never produces the condition of the hammy. Hammy thinks well of itself but is in proximity to insecurity, or maybe produces insecurity in its performance of itself.

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The category of the racial. Devon and whiteness. The refrain in the local press about the surreality of Michael Jackson in Devon has something to do with whiteness. Denise Ferreira da Silva reads the production of the category of the Racial alongside the production of the modern subject of the Enlightenment. She reads modern philosophy and the history of science as a narrative about the reasoning subject who is self-determining insofar as they are capable of reason. In this they are distinguished from the products of the rational, regulated universe, i.e. extended, contingent things, the body, that which is affectible. The development of the modern subject is a series of resolutions of the encroaching crisis of affectibility – the possibility that reason (the ability to perceive regulation and to produce representations) might determine that the reasoning subject is subject to reason, i.e. affectible. The resolution of the crisis of affectibility is, over and over, the category of the Racial, which is spatial (global) rather than temporal (historical), and affectible, contingent, subject to engulfment and/or annihilation. Alongside this critique, Da Silva develops the notion of '*poethics*' to construct the possibility of thinking that doesn't rely on the engulfment/annihilation of the affectible.

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The title *Poor Copy* evokes the idea of degradation away from a source or a centre. The contingent as degraded. It also, though, can be heard as a note of solace, comfort or tenderness.

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Poor, poor copy.

NOTES

Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Books, 2007)

— ‘Towards a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World’, *The Black Scholar* 44.2 (2014), pp. 81-97

Heinrich von Kleist, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ *The Drama Review: TDR* 16.3 (1972), pp. 22-26

Mark Fisher, ed. *The Resistible Demise of Michael Jackson* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009)